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**“Sustainability of behaviour” – a qualitative  
study of employees in a financial services  
organisation.**

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By

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## ABSTRACT

In the currently competitive business environment, organisations are placing an ever-increasing emphasis on their employees as a source of competitive advantage. It is believed that they possess a level of skills, knowledge, attitudes or behaviours upon which the organisation can draw as it grows and develops. Paradoxically, employees cannot always sustain the competencies that dictate an organisation's success in the contemporary work environment due to the significant levels of change that exist. This research explores sustainability of behaviour in an organisational setting, and develops a conceptual framework for understanding this phenomenon. The research follows an exploratory, qualitative design. Data was collected through in-depth and semi-structured interviews with fourteen employees in a large financial services organisation in the Western Cape. The data was analysed using techniques of analysis provided by grounded theory. Results indicate a multi-dimensional relationship between certain causal conditions, intervening conditions, contextual conditions and action/interaction strategies which all influence whether or not behaviour is sustained in the workplace. These findings have implications for human resource practices in the contemporary organisation.

University of Cape Town

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## CHAPTER ONE - INTRODUCTION

The environment in which businesses operate is in a period of significant transformation. Organisations are progressively under pressure to increase – and in some cases just maintain – their competitive advantage (Steers & Porter, 1991). The possession of certain skills, knowledge, attitudes or behaviours by an organisation's workforce is what dictates the success of an organisation in the currently competitive marketplace. Paradoxically, in the context of such unprecedented change, organisational members are not always able to sustain such skills, knowledge, attitudes or behaviours, measurable upon entering the organisation, over time. Whether or not employees can sustain behaviour therefore becomes an important question for organisations, as sustainability of behaviour becomes a source of competitive advantage (Collins & Porras, 1994).

Sustainability of behaviour is concerned with maintaining a predetermined minimum level of knowledge, skills, attitudes or behaviours continuously for the duration of employment in an organisational setting. In the present study, the terms 'maintaining behaviour' and 'sustainability of behaviour' are not distinguishable from each other, and are used interchangeably.

Despite the increasing necessity that employees are able to sustain behaviour in the face of intense competition and rapid change, it is surprising that so little empirical research has been conducted on the topic. No studies have, to date, investigated 'sustainability of behaviour' in the organisational context. There are similarities between the concept 'sustainability of behaviour' and other areas of research, which are discussed at a later stage in this document. However, these studies cannot provide an explanation for sustainability of behaviour in the organisational setting, which remains to be explored.

The purpose of this study was therefore to explore sustainability of behaviour in an organisational context, and develop a conceptual framework for understanding this phenomenon in the form of a model. The research adopted a qualitative investigation



into the topic, which revealed a holistic, coherent representation of sustainability of behaviour from the personal perspective of individuals working in an organisational setting.

There are seven distinct chapters in this document. Chapter Two sets the context for and introduces the concept of 'sustainability of behaviour'. The changing nature of the world of work is reviewed, and the significance of such changes in relation to the present project is examined. A brief overview of related literature and research is provided whilst an inductive design inherent in qualitative research is maintained.

Chapter Three details the methodology employed in the present study. The sampling strategy is described, and the data collection methods and data analysis techniques discussed. Chapter Four documents the results obtained whereas Chapter Five analyses, interprets and discusses these findings in the light of prior literature and research.

Chapter Six considers the implications of the present study for organisational practice, analyses the limitations of the research project and makes some recommendations for future research. Finally, Chapter Seven concludes this study.

## CHAPTER TWO – SUSTAINABILITY OF BEHAVIOUR

*‘Only one, long-term sustainable source of competitive advantage exists: the intellectual capital that resides in the minds of people’*

- Cascio (2001, p. 14).

This chapter sets the context for and introduces the concept of ‘sustainability of behaviour’. In section 2.1, the contemporary nature of the world of work is analysed, particularly in relation to South African business. Consideration is given to the amount of change in the business environment in order to highlight the tension between organisations needing to be flexible yet also to sustain certain behaviours at the same time. In section 2.2, the concept of ‘sustainability of behaviour’ is developed, and a definition provided. Section 2.3 records a brief overview of related literature and research. The intention of this section is to introduce the reader to the substantive area rather than provide a comprehensive review of the literature in order to convey an inductive design, which is consistent with the methodological assumptions of qualitative research. Section 2.4 explores how changes in the business environment influenced and gave rise to the research problem, indicating the significance of such a project at this time. In section 2.5 the purpose statement is introduced to this context, and a summary of the chapter is offered in section 2.6.

### **2.1 TOWARDS A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: THE CHANGING NATURE OF THE WORLD OF WORK IN SOUTH AFRICA AND THE IMPACT OF THESE CHANGES**

Historians of apartheid have amply documented how the state explicitly disadvantaged black South Africans to protect white interests in South Africa (see Adam, 2000; Henrard, 2003). With the Dutch settlers gaining government control in 1948, the majority of the population was denied access to education, jobs and opportunity through a process of rigorous discrimination (Human, 1996). In 1961, South Africa left the commonwealth and became a Republic enabling the Nationalist government to entrench apartheid into policies and laws (Thomas & Bendixen, 2000). The upliftment of the Afrikaner worker, it was felt, would only successfully occur if

“protected” against “non-white competition” (Adam, p. 27). Over time, both internal and external pressures resulted in the inception of a Government of National Unity in April 1994 (Thomas & Bendixen). Since then, South African business has found itself in a period of significant transformation. The contemporary environment is characterised by service and quality driven economies, intense and unprecedented global competition, technological breakthroughs at breakneck speed, demographic workforce changes, high time pressures and growing worker mobility (Rantanen, 1999; Thompson, 1997; Vloeberghs, 1998).

Financial services institutions, such as the organisation in which this research study was conducted, are exposed to some unique challenges in the marketplace in addition to those mentioned above (Sparrow, 2000). In the past two years, they have undergone a crisis. In the space of six months more than 20 banks collapsed, merged, were taken over or simply surrendered their banking licences (Evans, 2002). In conjunction with these occurrences was the Rand’s instability, most dramatically its 40% falls at the end of 2001, which had a direct effect on confidence in the sector. Factors such as these, including issues such as the blurring of the distinction between banks and building societies, the increased internationalisation of the sector and the entrance of new retail players, have compelled many institutions to rationalize their operations and look for improved levels of productivity from their staff (Asif & Sargeant, 2000).

With these ever-tightening constraints placed on South African organisations, managers have had to look for new mechanisms to increase – and in some cases just maintain – their level of organisational effectiveness and efficiency (Steers & Porter, 1991). They are attempting to remain competitive in several ways. To begin with, to be competitive in such a fast paced market, organisations have realised that the key to competitive advantage is their human resources (Lawson, 2001). In such a competitive environment, planning and investment are unable to stop competition from imitating carefully developed product-market positions, manufacturing capabilities and technological resources (Bartlett & Ghoshal, 2002). On the other hand, human resources are more difficult to imitate. There are no direct substitutes and they enable companies to pursue distinguishing business opportunities (Barney, 1991; Bartlett & Ghoshal; Lado, Boyd & Wright, 1992). An organisation’s human

capital thus represents a source of unique competitive advantage – in short, people are the key strategic resource, making it increasingly essential for organisations to give higher priority to human resource issues in their thinking (Bartlett & Ghoshal; Lawson; Thompson, 1997; Tovey, 1993).

Secondly, organisations are discovering the need for flexibility in how they are structured, how they plan their work processes and how they engage their human resources as a means to remain competitive (Bartlett & Ghoshal, 2002; Furnham, 2000; Garavan & McGuire, 2001; Iles, 1997; Thompson, 1997). In particular, human resource flexibility is what many business solutions hinge on (Thompson). It is no longer sufficient to just be skilled in a particular job or specialisation, as these will certainly change over time or even disappear completely (Hardijzer, 1999). Human resource flexibility requires that employees are able to adapt and enhance their skills so as to be able to perform well in different types of jobs and organisations (Hardijzer). It is important here to distinguish between human resource flexibility and sustainability of behaviour. Sustainability of behaviour is not concerned with little or no change in behaviour. People naturally develop over time during the course of their employment. As the organisation changes strategy or direction to meet environmental demands, employees may be required to utilise a different combination of skills, knowledge, attitudes or behaviours during such changes, which is human resource flexibility. Sustainability of behaviour relates to the requirement that employees sustain a certain level of output, or effective behaviour despite changes in their work or environment. The contemporary workplace behaviour is thus placing competing demands on employees who are expected to sustain behaviour, while at the same time work in a manner that allows the organisation to be flexible enough to draw from its skills and resources as and when the marketplace demands.

A third way that organisations are attempting to remain competitive is by flattening the organisational structure. In a hierarchical, pyramid organisation, information flows from the bottom and orders from the top. This type of organisation is too slow to survive the fast paced age of global competition and heavy reliance on information technology where the speed of quick decision-making is needed at the lowest possible level of the organisation (Appelbaum & Santiago, 1997). The hierarchical organisation is thus withering away, resulting in a reduction in the number of

employees at all levels, and the elimination of managerial layers (Appelbaum & Santiago; Baruch, 1999; Bozionelos, 2001; Hardijzer, 1999; Ho, 1997; Newell & Dopson, 1996; Vicere, 1998). More discretion needs to be given to employees throughout the organisation who have to be empowered, and ideally motivated, to spot, develop and implement their own solutions to the challenges which arise, using personal contacts and sources of information (Thompson & Richardson, 1996). More demands are being placed on fewer employees, on whom the organisation is relying for its competitive advantage. Whether or not these employees exhibit the required behaviours during their employment therefore becomes of paramount importance.

Finally, while organisations have for some time viewed their financial and physical resources from a long-term perspective, only recently have they begun to apply this same perspective to their human resources (Steers & Porter, 1991). Many organisations are now beginning to pay increasing attention to developing their employees as future resources (a “talent bank”) upon which they can draw as they grow and develop (Steers & Porter, p. 4). The concept of human resources as a source of competitive advantage implies that people have certain competencies that provide economic value to the company (Lawson, 2001). Competencies are the underlying characteristics of an individual such as knowledge in specific fields, specific skills and specific personal attributes that an individual needs to perform each job task effectively (Wallis, 2002). Fundamental to this is an organisation being able to identify the ownership of specific skills and competencies, and their implementation at any given time (Civelli, 1998). If an organisation has identified which competencies it has, as the environment demands it has the capability to draw from these ‘resources’ which have been identified and exist among its workforce. Employees are thus required to exhibit these previously identified skills, knowledge, attitudes or behaviours as and when it is demanded of them during the course of their employment. The workforce is, in other words, expected to sustain behaviours that provide economic value to the organisation during the course of their employment.

In summary, the current economic climate, dictated by competitive forces and the emergence of global markets, is motivating organisations to look to their human resources as a significant source of competitive advantage. Organisations require a workforce that is flexible enough to adapt to the changes in the marketplace, yet they

also require that a level of previously identified skills, knowledge, attitudes and behaviours be present over time. The ability to sustain behaviour therefore becomes an important research question in the contemporary work environment.

In the next section, a definition for ‘sustainability of behaviour’ is developed. Being explicit about the meaning of this central concept avoids different interpretations of the term (Mouton, 1996).

## 2.2 DEFINING SUSTAINABILITY OF BEHAVIOUR

A definition depends on ways in which a concept informs a particular researcher or practitioner about such behaviour. There were no previous studies specifically investigating ‘sustainability of behaviour’ in the organisational context at the time of the present study. The central constructs had not been fully developed, and there was no internally consistent viewpoint that accurately reflected empirical knowledge about the concept (Beckerman, 1994). Definitional diversity is to be expected during the emergent phase of a new idea (Mouton, 1996), so it was necessary to define sustainability of behaviour unambiguously to avoid different interpretations of the term.

To define the concept ‘sustainability of behaviour’ in a way that informed contemporary practitioners about such behaviour, a preliminary exercise was conducted with seven industrial and organisational psychology practitioners in the South African business arena. These practitioners defined this concept with the purpose of guiding initial thinking and interpretation around it. The respondents who participated in the preliminary exercise provided varying definitions for sustainability of behaviour, such as:

*“The ability to add value on a continuous basis.”*

*“Behaviours that an individual is able and motivated to keep up over time.”*

*“Relevant concepts are: consistency of behaviour, maintained over time, contexts, tasks, roles, motivational factors may impact whether behaviour is sustained.”*

*“Behaviour brought about by conscious will, and not dependent on variables introduced during assessment, but which may not be present in the normal day at work. Sustainability of behaviour is not necessarily equal to ideal behaviour (the competency definition), but more aligned to preferable style of behaviour ‘curved’ in the right direction through feedback, mentorship, training and experience.”*

*“Those behaviours that keep the individual competitive and an asset for the company over time.”*

What emerged from this exercise was that sustainability of behaviour relates to an individual maintaining a certain minimum level of knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours that allows an organisation to remain competitive over time. As mentioned before, sustainability of behaviour is not stability of behaviour (little or no change in behaviour), since people naturally grow and develop during their employment. Rather, it is concerned with employees maintaining a certain level of effort, upholding a level of knowledge, displaying a level of skills, etc. in their daily work, which is based on what was measured at the time they first entered an organisation. For the purposes of this study, therefore, sustainability of behaviour within the organisational context relates to *‘maintaining a predetermined minimum level of knowledge, skills, attitudes or behaviours continuously for the duration of employment in an organisational setting’*.

The term ‘sustainability’ is often acquainted with the environmental context and development, i.e. sustainable development, so it was necessary to distinguish between this concept and sustainability of behaviour in order to avoid confusion between these terms. Sustainable development is defined as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of the future to meet their own” (Castle, Berrens & Polasky, 1996, p. 475). This relates to the requirement that human welfare or life opportunities be non-diminishing from generation to generation (Pezzey, 1992). Sustainable development arises as a constraint on present actions to ensure that future generations have similar opportunities (Howarth, 2001). Sustainability of behaviour is concerned with whether or not an individual can maintain a level of effort, knowledge, skills or behaviour in an organisational setting over time.

Both concepts are concerned with human behaviour and have a time dimension. Sustainability of behaviour relates to maintaining a level of behaviour over time, and sustainable development with present behaviour that will ensure that certain environmental, social and economic conditions will be present over time. In other words, sustainable development is focused on present actions, and the influence that these will have on the future, and sustainability of behaviour with continuously displaying a certain minimum level of behaviour over time. However, the levels of analysis are different. Sustainability of behaviour focuses on the level of the individual in the organisation whilst sustainable development focuses on the homogeneous group level – i.e., variations between groups on a construct. Of concern are the needs and behaviours of large groups of people or even entire populations and the effect that this behaviour has on future populations, whereas sustainability of behaviour focuses on the behaviour of the individual and the impact this has on an organisation.

‘Sustainability of behaviour’ and ‘sustainable development’ are thus similar in some ways, yet their overall focus is fundamentally different. This section provided a definition for sustainability of behaviour, while the next section reviews literature and research related to this concept.

### **2.3 BRIEF OVERVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE AND RESEARCH**

Literature was used in a manner consistent with the methodological assumptions of this research study. Since the study was qualitative, literature was used inductively so as not to direct questions asked by the researcher (Creswell, 1994). By remaining true to the methodological assumptions of a qualitative study, hypotheses and theoretical explanations that existed in the literature were consulted when what emerged from the data of the present study directed the researcher to such literature. Using the literature in this manner prevented the formulation of preconceptions, and by commencing with a phenomena or behaviour that emerged from the data rather than previously identified theories, there was less chance that the research outcomes were theoretically removed from the needs of the subject under study (Hirschman & Thompson, 1997; Locke, 1996). It was still necessary, however, to determine what was written on the topic to orientate the reader, to provide a context for the study and to ensure that the study made a unique contribution to the body of knowledge. Related



literature and research was reviewed to identify gaps in understanding and thereby to establish the importance of such a study at this time (Creswell). Following this, literature was used in the Discussion Chapter to compare and contrast with the results.

Despite the necessity that employees sustain behaviour in the organisational setting, no research was found that could adequately explain why employees could not sustain a level of behaviour over time, or that was focused on whether certain types of behaviours would be sustained during future task performance on the job.

Sustainability of behaviour was thus absent from leading management journals or the field of industrial and organisational psychology, so it became necessary to extrapolate information from related disciplines and translate this information into the organisational setting. One such area is the field of behavioural momentum in psychiatry and behavioural psychology which has as its focus the ability to persist with behaviour, or continuing with a course of action despite obstacles/resistance.

### **Behavioural Momentum**

Behavioural momentum was originally proposed by Nevin, Mandell, and Atak (1983), and is a model for understanding the persistence of behaviour in the face of altered environmental conditions (Mace et al., 1988; Plaud & Gaither, 1996b; Plaud, Gaither & Lawrence, 1997; Plaud, Plaud & von Duvillard, 1999). Behavioural momentum uses Newton's laws of physical motion as a metaphor to explain behavioural dynamics (Nevin, 1992). According to Isaac Newton's first law of physical motion, a body in motion remains in a uniform and straight line unless acted on by an external force (Plaud, Gaither & Lawrence; Plaud, Plaud & von Duvillard). Newton's second law states that whenever an unbalanced force acts on a body, it produces an acceleration in the direction of the force that is not only directly proportional to that force, but also inversely proportional to the mass of the body (Plaud, Gaither & Lawrence; Plaud, Plaud & von Duvillard). For example, the rate at which a motorcar travelling at a constant speed will slow down is directly proportional to the force that the driver applies to the brakes and inversely proportional to the size and weight of the car (Plaud & Gaither). This basic law of physics was applied to operant behaviour (Plaud & Gaither, 1996a; Plaud & Vogeltanz, 1993, as cited in Plaud, Plaud & von Duvillard). It has been empirically demonstrated that behaviour varies in its resistance to changing environmental

contingencies and that this resistance is due to the rate of reinforcement density associated with the behaviour (Nevin, Mandell & Atak).

This model could have great utility in helping understand why some behaviours persist over time whereas others quickly extinguish once the contingencies for the behaviours have changed (Plaud & Gaither, 1996b). It could thus provide a useful literature source to consult and compare with the results that emerged from the present study. However, behavioural momentum has only been applied to human behaviour in the field of behaviour modification and therapy in clinical psychology and was not intended for, and has not been tested in, the organisational setting (Plaud, Plaud & von Duvillard, 1999). For these reasons, it could not provide an explanation for why employees in the organisational setting sustain or do not sustain behaviour over time. Another concern was that behavioural momentum focuses primarily on external, environmental conditions to explain behaviour (Plaud & Gaither), which contradicts theories that argue that individual attributes determine how an individual behaves. The fact that there are theories which provide completely different explanations of human behaviour, i.e., that human behaviour is a consequence of intrinsic attributes, or external conditions, led to a concern whether this field could adequately explain such behaviour. The researcher questioned how it could explain such behaviour if it did not take factors such as intrinsic attributes of an individual into account as influencing subsequent behaviour. Literature and research focusing on individual attributes was therefore examined to see whether it could provide an answer to the present research question.

### **Self-Theory**

Snyder and Williams (1982) wrote how many clinical psychologists found behaviouristic models too limited to account for the processes they were observing, resulting in a popularity of self-referent constructs (*self* being the composite of individual attributes of an individual) in theories of behaviour. Views such as these led to the belief that understanding the causes and concomitants of organisational behaviour requires some prior understanding of the concept of self (Snyder & Williams). One such theory with its focus on the concept of self is self-theory. It is based on the simple premise derived from a general systems view that human beings have a fundamental need to maintain or enhance the phenomenal self (Muraven,

Baumeister & Tice, 1999). A fundamental tenet is that it is the individual's experience that determines behaviour in any given situation, meaning that differences among people have to be identified to be able to predict behaviour (Snyder & Williams).

All behaviour is primarily a function of what goes on inside the person, and all objective situations are perceived as opportunities for, or threats to, the fundamental maintenance or enhancement of the self (Snyder & Williams, 1982). For example, self theorists would not view a low performing employee in the traditional sense as the person being 'un-motivated' or 'not influenced by the supervisor.' Instead, they would argue that individuals are always motivated to maintain or enhance their concept of self. The difference between a high performing individual and a low performing one, therefore, is not in terms of level of motivation. Both workers are motivated, but the high performer perceives high performance as a means of maintaining or enhancing his/her self-theory while the low performer does not (Snyder & Williams).

Theories that account for individual attributes and the influence that such attributes have on work-related behaviour are useful in that they provide organisational psychologists with solutions that may be overlooked by those who subscribe only to more traditional, 'external' approaches. However, despite the frequency of self-referent constructs in psychological theory, their track record in the empirical research literature has been disappointing (Snyder & Williams, 1982). Wylie (1974, as cited in Snyder & Williams) concluded that while such constructs have been used to improve the predictive accuracy of existing behavioural laws, typically these constructs are disjunctively stretched to cover so many inferred cognitive and motivational processes that their predictive and analytical utility have diminished greatly. In addition, the premise on which they are built is that behaviouristic models are too limited to account for behaviour. Rather than trying to build on behavioural theories, they attempt to provide an alternative explanation. With both fields providing strong evidence to support their arguments, a reader is left feeling that something has not been accounted for, and that these two different theories cannot both explain the same behaviour. This led to the conclusion that neither of these theories (or fields) are complete or could adequately provide an explanation to the current research problem, since they contradict one another.

The field of applied behaviour analysis claimed to have identified variables relevant to maintaining behaviour, and was thus consulted to assess whether it could potentially provide an explanation for the present research problem.

### **Applied Behaviour Analysis**

Within the field of applied behaviour analysis as it pertains to the treatment of problem behaviour in clinical psychology (Schoen, 2003), it has become best practice to conduct a functional assessment prior to selecting an intervention (Austin, Carr & Agnew, 1999). The term *functional assessment* simply refers to methods used to identify variables relevant to maintaining behaviour (Mace, Lalli & Lalli, 1991). Since this field has its focus on the maintenance of behaviour, it was reviewed to determine whether it could explain why employees do or do not sustain behaviour in the organisational setting, since the concepts of sustaining behaviour and maintaining behaviour are not distinguishable from each other.

Several studies (such as Iwata, Vollmer & Zarcone, 1990; Lerman & Iwata, 1993; Mace, Lalli & Lalli, 1991) made an attempt to identify the variables associated with the occurrence or non-occurrence of behaviours such as self-injury, aggression, and disruption. Target behaviours within predetermined blocks of time were recorded to determine whether there was any reliable distribution of behaviour across time (Mace, Lalli & Lalli). Although these studies on the assessment of such problem behaviours have presented descriptive data, few have demonstrated any clear environment-behaviour relationships (Lerman & Iwata). These studies are also far from being formalised (Austin, Carr & Agnew, 1999). Despite the impact that functional assessment has had in clinical areas, maintaining variables are rarely reported or assessed in organisational behaviour management literature (Austin, Carr & Agnew).

According to Austin, Carr and Agnew (1999), there are many potential reasons for the glaring omission of variables that affect sustainability of behaviour in the organisational behaviour literature. Perhaps organisational behaviour management (OBM) practitioners do not need a formal procedure for identifying the maintaining variables in organisational settings since many OBM interventions have been relatively successful (Austin, Carr & Agnew). However, the success of such programs

may have occurred as a result of the practitioner identifying the correct maintaining variables, some of the correct maintaining variables or none of these variables (Austin, Carr & Agnew). In other words, there is no real evidence as to what contributed to the success of such programs.

An additional problem is the amount of behaviour involved in work. At work, individuals must interact with one another and their superiors, they must create accomplishments (alone and in groups) requiring extremely complex motor and verbal behavioural chains, they must often bring all of their training and history to bear on some problems in a time consuming effort (Austin, Carr & Agnew, 1999). All of these activities require employees to interact effectively with their environment and many forms of equipment (such as computers and office machines), as well as plan activities for themselves and others and manage their time, all the while following appropriate rules and policies (Austin, Carr & Agnew). There is thus possibly a number and variety of 'obstacles' hindering the ability to sustain behaviour which can be as a result of anything from employee lack of knowledge or other antecedents, which could also be contributing to the lack of research and procedures for identification of variables that relate to sustainability of behaviour at work (Austin, Carr & Agnew).

The field of applied behavioural analysis could not therefore provide an explanation for the phenomenon 'sustainability of behaviour'. In summary, few studies in this field have demonstrated any clear environment-behaviour relationships, these studies are far from being formalised and they are rarely reported or assessed in organisational behaviour management literature (Austin, Carr & Agnew, 1999).

### **Special Education**

The area of special education focuses on the sustainability of research-based practices from one setting to another over time. It was thus analysed to ascertain whether it could explain sustainability of behaviour in the organisational setting, or at least provide some foundation on which to interpret the results of this study.

There have been recent advances in the area of special education concerning the sustainability of research-based practices over time (e.g., Fuchs & Fuchs, 1998; Gable

& Hendrickson, 2000; Mastropieri & Scruggs, 1998; Vaughn, Klingner & Hughes, 2000). The lack of “linkage” between research and practice, and the extent to which research-based practices are sustained after researchers leave target sites have been a growing concern (Vaughn, Klingner & Hughes).

Studies have concluded that behaviour exhibited during special education settings are not maintained after returning to regular classrooms (Drabman, Spitalnik & O’Leary, 1973; Robertson, Simon, Pachman & Drabman, 1979; Turkewitz, O’Leary & Ironsmith, 1975). This has led to the U.S. Office of Special Education Programs recently providing funding to conduct research that is designed to understand the linkages between research and sustained practice (Vaughn, Klingner & Hughes, 2000). Even in special education, the importance of this phenomena and lack of research in this area is being realised.

Research in the field of special education has not, to date, provided reasons to explain why such behaviours are or are not sustained from special educational settings to regular classrooms, and so could not answer the present research problem.

### **Activity Theory**

A new field of research that professes to explain work-related behaviour is activity theory. This literature was reviewed in search of an explanation for sustainability of behaviour in the organisational setting.

Activity theory has as its focus a coherent system of internal mental processes and external behaviours and motivations that are combined and organised by the mechanisms of self-regulation to permit one to achieve conscious goals (Bedny, Karwowski & Bedny, 2001; Bedny & Meister, 1999). Activity theory has an extensive history in the Soviet Union dating back to the works of Vygotsky and his followers (Bedny, Karwowski & Bedny). It is a psychological paradigm that is claimed to be a foundation for the study of work behaviour (Bedny, Seglin & Meister, 2000). This theory recognises the importance of, and interrelationship between, certain internal attributes (personality, motives) and activity (behaviour) (Bedny, Karwowski & Bedny).

Activity theory is argued to be one of the most important theoretical paradigms in psychology as it deals with activity at three levels of abstraction as opposed to the provision of a single explanation (Bedny, Karwowski & Bedny, 2001; Engestrom, Miettinen & Punamaki, 1999; McCafferty, Roebuck & Wayland, 2001; Nardi, 1997). The first, 'activity', refers to human behaviour in a general sense and is associated with 'motive', the second level involves the two inseparable concepts of 'action' and 'goal', and the third deals with operations and the associated conditions under which action is carried out (McCafferty, Roebuck & Wayland). This theory initially held promise for explaining sustainability of behaviour in the organisational setting. It provides a more comprehensive explanation of behaviour than behavioural momentum or self-theory in that it proposes an interrelationship between variables to explain such behaviour. In this way, some of the weaknesses associated with either approach are partially overcome. Furthermore, it is modelled on behaviour in the workplace, and therefore has the context of analysis in common with the present study. There is no mention, however, whether or not individuals could sustain such goal-oriented behaviour after the achievement of a goal, as this area of research focuses only on work-related behaviour in relation to goal attainment. In addition, this theory does not account for the influence of external, environment conditions, and how they possibly influence such behaviour. The field of activity theory thus fell short of providing an explanation for the research problem of the present study.

In summary, an overview of related literature revealed that, to date, there was no adequate explanation for why employees sustain or do not sustain behaviour, skills, knowledge or attitudes in the organisational setting over time. This led to the present research problem and significance of such a study at this time.

#### **2.4 THE RESEARCH PROBLEM AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

An industrial and organisational psychologist working as a consultant for a large financial services organisation discussed a problem that he and several of his colleagues had noticed: individuals were able to display certain behaviours when they first entered the organisation, but were not always able to sustain these behaviours at the same level for the duration of their employment. This meeting was followed by another held with seven such psychological practitioners working in various large organisations who also conveyed that they were experiencing this problem. The idea

for the research problem and present study thus arose from discussions with industrial and organisational psychologists practicing in the field.

An organisation faces a problem when employees do not exhibit the necessary competencies required of them during the course of their employment. The possession of certain competencies by an organisation's workforce is what dictates the success of an organisation in the currently competitive marketplace. Whether employees are able to sustain identified levels of competencies during the changes dictated by the marketplace, therefore, becomes an important question for organisations, as sustainability of behaviour becomes a source of competitive advantage (Collins & Porras, 1994). Understanding what factors influence sustainability of behaviour could assist organisations when trying to compete in a competitive marketplace. Research was needed to investigate this phenomenon.

## **2.5 THE PURPOSE STATEMENT**

The purpose of this study was to explore sustainability of behaviour in an organisational setting using the techniques of analysis provided by grounded theory, and to develop a model for understanding this phenomenon.

## **2.6 SUMMARY**

This chapter documented the contemporary nature of the South African world of work that led to the significance and purpose of the present study. Sustainability of behaviour in the organisational context is a new concept pertaining to the work-related behaviour of employees. It is concerned with maintaining a predetermined minimum level of behaviour for the duration of employment in an organisational setting. Related areas of literature and research such as behavioural momentum, self-theory, applied behavioural analysis, special education and activity theory could not provide an answer to the current research problem. What emerged was a need for research to investigate sustainability within organisations – to determine what factors cause, moderate, or influence sustainability of behaviour in the light of the dynamic nature of jobs, organisations, and their environments (Thornton & Byham, 1982; Gladwin, Newbury & Reiskin, 1996). The following chapter details the methodology employed in the present study.



## CHAPTER THREE - METHODOLOGY

*'If the research is worth doing then one is likely to be dealing with a problem which is not fully understood, and for which the ideal course of investigation cannot be charted in advance with any certainty'*

- Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Lowe (1991)

The purpose of this study was to explore sustainability of behaviour in an organisational setting, and to develop a model for this phenomenon. The previous chapter introduced the reader to this substantive area, described the conceptual framework of the study and outlined the research problem and objectives. This chapter details the method employed in this research, and its application to the present study.

This chapter is divided into seven sections and a number of subsections. Section 3.1 introduces the reader to the paradigm in which the research is contextualised, including a justification for using a qualitative methodology to answer the present research question. Section 3.2 outlines time factors in organisational research. Section 3.3 details the sample and the sampling strategy employed, section 3.4 explains the data collection process of the present study and in section 3.5, the techniques of data analysis and interpretation are discussed. Section 3.5 is broken down into section 3.5.1 dealing with the various coding techniques of analysis used, and section 3.5.2 with the conditional matrix which helped place the present study in context. Issues of bias, reliability, validity, generalisability and ethics are analysed in section 3.6, and a summary of this chapter provided in section 3.7.

### 3.1 THE RESEARCH PARADIGM

In finding a research method, it was important that it would help the researcher to understand the complexity of the question: why do employees sustain, or not sustain behaviour in an organisational setting, and what factors influence this phenomenon? As this area of research had not yet been fully explored, a method had to fit this aspect and provide the means to learn more about it. Since little was known about the topic,

it was necessary to begin at the beginning and undertake exploratory research (Neuman, 1994).

Exploratory studies are essential whenever a researcher is breaking new ground and they can almost always yield new insights into a topic for research (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). Such forms of research are valued because of a concern with developing new areas of knowledge, which in turn can have implications for altering practice (Carnine, 1997). It could have been possible to hypothesise which variables influence sustainability of behaviour, and systematically study and eliminate each variable until a positive correlation was reached. However, the probability of finding a solution to this particular research problem within the timeframe was uncertain, especially due to the lack of prior research. The goal of the present study was therefore to explicate the central concepts and constructs of the subject area to provide an understanding of this area and form the basis for any subsequent studies (Babbie & Mouton).

The best strategy to use when discovering and exploring a new area and developing hypotheses is qualitative research (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In fact, one of the main reasons for conducting a qualitative study was that the study was exploratory, not much had been written about the topic and the researcher sought to listen to informants and build a picture based on their ideas (Creswell, 1994). The research issue was not clear-cut and questions to respondents were likely to result in complex, discursive replies (Brannen, 1988). For these reasons, qualitative research enabled the present study to explore the topic with unknown variables and theory bases (Creswell; Neuman, 1994).

Since this study explored the reality that was constructed by individuals involved in the research situation (Creswell, 1994), in terms of ontology, the nominalist position was assumed (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). The epistemology of anti-positivism was supported in this research as it holds the view that the social world can only be understood from the perspective of the individual who is directly involved in the activities which are to be studied (Burrell & Morgan). It was necessary that the researcher interact with those that were studied in order to understand the individual interpretation of events, situations and interactions within the organisational setting,

which is associated with the epistemology of anti-positivism (Creswell). The methodology with which the present study investigated and obtained knowledge about the social world fell within the ideographic approach, as it held the view that the social world could only be understood by obtaining first-hand knowledge of the subjects under investigation, involving analysis of the subjective accounts which unfolded during the process of investigation (Burrell & Morgan). The nature of the information sought in this study, and the approach taken to obtain it, thus justified the use of a qualitative methodology (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

The qualitative research paradigm has its roots in cultural anthropology and American sociology (Kirk & Miller, 1986, as cited in Creswell, 1994). It is grounded in a philosophical position which is broadly 'interpretivist' in the sense that it is concerned with how individuals interpret, create, explain, experience and give meaning to and maintain their social worlds (Mason, 1996; Neuman, 1994). The intent of the present research was to understand a particular problem in the organisational context, namely, why employees do or do not sustain behaviour over time, and to develop a holistic picture of the concept in the form of a model. By allowing informants to report detailed views in a natural setting, a qualitative methodology enabled the researcher to build such a complex, holistic picture formed with words on how participants experience and give meaning to the sustainability of behaviour phenomena (Creswell).

Since the overall paradigm of the present study was qualitative, inductive logic prevailed (Creswell, 1994). Categories emerged from the research participants rather than being identified *a priori* by the researcher (Creswell). Literature, data collection and analysis were all used in a manner consistent with the methodological assumptions of a qualitative study. For this reason, literature was used sparingly in the beginning of the research plan in order to convey an inductive design. Thereafter, literature was used to compare and contrast with the results that emerged, which are documented in the Discussion Chapter (Creswell).

In summary, a qualitative research methodology was the most suitable approach to uncover the complexities of sustainability of behaviour and provide a holistic picture

of the concept to enable the development of a model. It was necessary to determine whether such a methodology would also fit with the worldviews of the researcher.

### **The Researcher – Paradigm Fit**

When assessing which research methodology would best answer the research question, it was also necessary to establish whether there was a fit between a proposed methodology, and the worldviews of the researcher.

The worldview dominating the field of industrial and organisational psychology has undergone many changes since the commencement of the researcher's first degree in this field ten years ago. The field of industrial and organisational psychology was initially dominated by a preoccupation with the functionalist quest for predictability and control (Carr, 1998). As a result, the researcher's first four years of study were directed by the quantitative paradigm, resulting in her honours degree dissertation following a quantitative approach.

Organisational theory and research are moving toward a greater sensitivity of subjective perceptions of the world, as illustrated by the increasing focus on organisational culture located in the qualitative paradigm (e.g., Bagraim, 2001; Willmott, 1993; Wilson, 1999). This development has shifted the analysis of organisations from the study of 'objective' to 'subjective' data. Contemporary organisational research is, thus, composed less of 'factual' statements from detached observers about behaviour and more about statements from participants themselves. The result has been a psychology favouring qualitative methods of research (see Henriques, Hollway, Urwin, Venn & Walkerdine, 1984; Henwood & Pidgeon, 1992; Hollway, 1989; Potter & Wetherell, 1987). These changes are reflected in the knowledge of the researcher, which has broadened to encompass the qualitative paradigm during subsequent years of study.

Engaging with qualitative literature enabled the researcher to realise that she held the belief that valuable research could result from data that emerged from the research participants themselves, rather than being based on preconceived ideas that could influence what was collected. Involving individuals in the research would give a good indication of what was occurring in a situation, with the researcher's role being to

actively report the findings as they occurred during the research process. The interpretative/qualitative paradigm thus held the most promise for answering both the research question and being compatible with the researcher's views in the search for a method for this study.

The role of the researcher as the primary data collection instrument also necessitated the identification of personal values, assumptions and biases at the outset of the study (Miller, 1992, as cited in Creswell, 1994). In this way, the investigator's contribution to the research setting could be useful and positive rather than detrimental (Locke, Spirduso & Silverman, 1987). The researcher's perceptions of the financial services industry have been shaped by her personal experiences. From 1998 to the end of 2001, she worked as a consultant for an organisation in London, U.K., which had as its clients large financial services institutions. The organisation in which the present research was conducted was one of the researcher's clients during her employment in London, and as such, she became familiar with their products, culture and success in the financial services industry. However, her concern at the time was focused on the suitability of high-level candidates for senior level positions, not whether they would sustain certain behaviours, skills or competencies during the course of their employment.

Working within the financial services industry taught the researcher about the many pressures facing such organisations, and the researcher believes that this understanding of the context enhanced her awareness, knowledge and sensitivity to many of the challenges, decisions and issues encountered by organisations in this industry. However, previous experiences of working closely with the research organisation also contributed to the researcher bringing certain biases to the study (Miller, 1992, as cited in Creswell, 1994). Although every effort was made to ensure objectivity, the researcher was aware that these biases shaped the way she viewed and understood the data she collected and the way she interpreted her experiences (Miller, as cited in Creswell). The researcher commenced the study with the view that work within financial service organisations is fairly cut-throat and rigid, with little room for creativity. She understood this to be attributable to the reputation that such organisations seek to uphold, and the prescriptive nature of the financial services industry boards and bodies which exist to protect consumers purchasing their

products. Attempts to reduce these biases are discussed in section 3.6.1 in this chapter.

The qualitative research paradigm was thus logically the most appropriate methodology for this study as it was suitable both to answering the research question and was compatible with the worldviews of the researcher. With the research epistemology of the present study being anti-positivist, the view was held that events shape each other and only tentative explanations for one time and place are possible (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). It was thus important to recognise time factors in this research to avoid making generalisations beyond the methodological assumptions which underlie the present study.

### **3.2 TIME FACTORS IN ORGANISATIONAL RESEARCH**

Time is an important element that influenced the design and execution of the present research study since it dealt with the ability of individuals to sustain or not sustain behaviour over time. The focus of the present study therefore had an element of time attached to it, necessitating that time issues be given due consideration.

Time issues have long been of interest to managers and researchers, and studies incorporating time effects are becoming increasingly popular in organisational research (Bergh, 1993; Bergh, 1999). For example, a study conducted by Bergh and Holbein, (1997, as cited in Bergh) revealed that thirty-six percent of articles published in the Strategic Management Journal from 1980 to 1993 incorporated a time dimension. Time effects can greatly influence conceptual models, necessitating the recognition of the temporal nature of time in the present organisational study.

Data was collected at one point in time as opposed to longitudinally. The present research can thus merely provide a snapshot of reality that existed within a single time frame in the ongoing process of sustainability of behaviour. Exploratory studies such as the present study are often cross-sectional (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). Cross sectional research projects study some phenomenon by taking a cross-section of it at one time and analysing that cross-section (Babbie & Mouton). It was important to recognise that the results of this cross-sectional study are limited to one period of time

and subject to further tests based on data collected at different times (Babbie & Mouton).

This section recognised the importance of being explicit about the influence of time on organisational research. In the following section, the sampling strategy employed to select the research participants and the sample is discussed.

### **3.3 SAMPLE AND SAMPLING STRATEGY**

Qualitative samples tend to be purposive, rather than random (Kuzel, 1992, as cited in Miles & Huberman, 1994). The aim of sampling is to include those persons, places, and situations that will provide the greatest opportunity to gather the most relevant data about the phenomenon under investigation (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). At the same time, there were limits placed on the researcher's time and means, necessitating that the researcher set boundaries defining aspects of the cases that are studied (Miles & Huberman). The conceptual framework and research purpose of the present study therefore set the foci and boundaries for the sampling decisions (Miles & Huberman). Exploring sustainability of behaviour in the organisational setting limited the sample to include persons working within an organisation. The present study was also partly theoretically driven. In other words, the choice of informants and interactions was driven by a conceptual question, not by a concern for representativeness (Miles & Huberman).

Sampling involves decisions not only about which people to interview, but also about settings, events and social process (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Miles and Huberman identify four distinct sampling parameters that a researcher may have to touch on in order to answer a research question accurately, namely the setting, the actors, the event and the processes. Each of these sampling parameters influence the sample of the present research, and are thus outlined in this respect.

#### **The Sample**

The research question of the present study necessitated that the research be conducted in an organisational setting. One of the practitioners who alerted the researcher to the research problem arranged access for the researcher in a large financial services organisation. Gaining entry into the setting was thus relatively straightforward. The

setting for the research was thus the workplace of the individuals included in the sample.

The research organisation is made up of several organisational units spread across various locations. The sample was drawn from four such locations, namely the main offices of the organisation, which is divided into the main business unit comprising standard business functions such as accountancy, business analysis, compliance, sales and so forth (Site 1) and a further separate division (Site 2). This division focuses on market and performance research and analysis, and is located in a separate building on the same site as the main business unit. Closely geographically situated to the main offices but not at the same location is a division of the organisation that is largely comprised of project management teams (Site 3). This project management site is a new conceptual arrangement that operates as a separate business from the main unit, taking on all of the project management work of the other organisational functions. The final location from which the sample was drawn is located further away from the main building and project management site and also operates as a separate business unit (Site 4).

Each different office or site has a different working climate, and therefore has some unique cultural characteristics. For example, participants from Site 2 conveyed that their business was superior to the other sites and remarked that due to their success, the main business unit had modelled its human resource programs on the way their business was conducted. Site 3 was found to have a very relaxed atmosphere in comparison to the other organisational sites, evident in the dress, language, and style of address of the participants. Including several settings in this study strengthened the conceptual validity of the study (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This procedure also helped determine the conditions under which the findings would hold (Miles & Huberman). It must be noted, however, that all of the abovementioned sites have a similar organisational purpose and function, so in this sense, generalisation of the findings to other settings cannot be supported at a less abstract level.

Actors are the individuals or participants included in the sample (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In the present study, the sample consisted of fourteen individuals employed at one of four locations of a large financial services organisation in the Western Cape.



Of the sample, seven were male and seven female. They ranged from twenty-six to forty-five years old.

The researcher contacted each potential participant via email. She explained who she was, how she obtained their email address (from the Human Resources department), and the focus of the study. Out of twenty-two potential subjects, fifteen agreed to participate in the study. One of these potential participants repeatedly missed meeting dates, and did not return the researcher's phone calls. He was thus eliminated from participating in the research.

Employees that formed the sample of the present study fell within the middle-range seniority level in the organisation. These individuals could provide an accurate picture of their own personal experiences and understanding of sustainability of behaviour, as well as from interactions with people they manage, and those that manage them. Since the study explored sustainability of behaviour over time, entry-level employees could not provide the information needed to answer the research problem, as they would not have been with the organisation for long enough, and senior-managers in the organisational setting were not available to participate in this study.

Upon acceptance for inclusion, all subjects received written confirmation (via email) of the time, date and venue for a personal interview, together with a promise of confidentiality.

Using a qualitative research methodology, the focus of this study was the perceptions and meaning that participants attached to sustainability of behaviour in the organisational setting. The event explored in the present study was sustainability of behaviour. The processes explored in the current study were the action/interaction strategies undertaken by individuals to enable them to sustain behaviour over time.

In summary, participants were included in the present study that would provide the greatest opportunity to gather the most relevant data about the phenomenon under investigation (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). These consisted of fourteen managers working at one of four locations of a large, financial services organisation based in the

Western Cape. The next stage of the research process involved collecting data from the research sample.

### **3.4 DATA COLLECTION**

The nature of a data collection method should be consistent with the strategy of a research project (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2003). Since the present study employed a qualitative methodology to enable the researcher to explore and develop a holistic picture of the sustainability of behaviour phenomenon, the various data collection techniques associated with qualitative research were assessed for their suitability.

Data collection techniques primarily associated with qualitative research are interviews, observations, documents and visual images (Creswell, 1994). The data collection method that held the most promise for obtaining information from the research participants on the sustainability of behaviour phenomena was the interview technique. It is to this technique that attention will now be focussed.

#### **Research Instrument – The Interview**

To explore sustainability of behaviour in the organisational setting, participants had to be able to provide subjective accounts of their understanding and experience with regard to this phenomenon to uncover new insights into the subject area and explore what was happening (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 1991). The interview technique provided the best means to explore the views of informants as they could reveal the ‘what’ and the ‘how’, as well as allow an exploration as to ‘why’ employees were able to sustain behaviour in an organisational setting or not (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, p. 248). The interview was thus logically the most appropriate data collection method for the present study. Since several types of interviews exist, the type of interview chosen also had to be consistent with the research strategy, question and objectives of this study.

With the present research being exploratory in nature, in-depth and semi-structured interviews were the most suitable types of interview (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2003). They allowed the researcher to explore the topic which had unknown variables and theory bases, since they allowed the researcher to probe the research issue which

was not clear-cut and which resulted in complex, discursive replies (Brannen, 1988; Creswell, 1994). Semi-structured and in-depth interviews are distinguished by their degree of standardization: that is, the extent to which the interviewer is allowed to vary both the content and order of the questions asked (Ackroyd & Hughes, 1981). In-depth interviews do not impose any *a priori* categorisation that may limit the field of inquiry so provided an effective means to explore and uncover initial thinking around a new concept such as sustainability of behaviour (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill).

The in-depth interviews had no predetermined lists of questions; however, the researcher had a clear idea of what aspects she wanted to explore, namely the interviewees' perceptions and understandings of why they sustain or do not sustain behaviour over time. After a general explanation of the focus of the research, participants were asked to discuss anything that came to mind in relation to the ability to sustain behaviour over time. Each area of focus was probed to ensure the meaning was correctly understood. The interviewees were given the opportunity to talk freely about events, behaviour and beliefs in relation to the topic area and thus had a lot of control over the process and content of the interviews. The general philosophy of the in-depth interviews was to find out what participants thought and knew, so the researcher avoided dominating the views of the respondents by imposing her world into theirs (Rubin & Rubin, 1995).

Once the areas of focus relevant to the phenomenon emerged from the first three to four in-depth interviews, the researcher began to probe these specific areas in subsequent interviews using the semi-structured interview technique. The researcher drew up a list of themes to be covered in these remaining interviews, although these varied from interview to interview (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2003). The responses of these initial interviews thus directed questioning in the remaining interviews held with the participants, which were semi-structured in nature.

Semi-structured interviews focused on the organisational environment and whether or not participants believed the environment was quick to change, the type of leadership/management style they felt was conducive or not to sustainability of behaviour over time, job characteristics such as whether their work was clear-cut or not, and whether they felt the organisation itself sustained behaviour over time. Based

on the responses received, the interviewer probed for specific examples or clarification. Gradually the interviewer obtained a holistic picture of sustainability of behaviour from the perspective of each participant.

All but two of the interviews conducted by the researcher with the fourteen participants were held at the organisational sites. Five interviews were held at Site 1, three at Site 2, three at Site 3 and one at Site 4. Two interviews took place in coffee shops. All of the interviews were tape recorded after the participants gave their permission to be recorded. The interviews were transcribed to provide an accurate rendition of the information exchange. They ranged from fifty minutes to one hour and fifteen minutes. During the interviews, the researcher engaged in memo writing. In addition, notes were taken immediately after each interview describing the setting in which the interview took place, the style of dress and address of the respondents, and any information deemed relevant to the present study. Notes were taken, for example, on how formally respondents were dressed in a particular location. The responses obtained from the research participants provided the basis for analysis of the data.

### **3.5 DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION**

Since the present study aimed to learn more about sustainability of behaviour in the organisational context, it was necessary to undertake qualitative, exploratory research. Qualitative data analysis involves reducing large voluminous amounts of information to create certain patterns, categories, or themes, and it is then interpreted using some schema (Creswell, 1994). Tesch (1990, as cited in Creswell) called this process “de-contextualisation” and “re-contextualisation.” The process results in a higher level of analysis. After taking the data apart, the final product is the emergence of a larger, holistic picture. Qualitative social research, and in particular, exploratory research, has, however, very few guidelines to follow (Neuman, 1994; Turner, 1983). The steps are not well defined, and it is therefore difficult to conduct (Neuman). As Miles (1979, as cited in Miles & Huberman, 1994) phrased it, ‘the most serious and central difficulty in the use of qualitative data is that methods of analysis are not well formulated...how can we be sure that an ‘earthy,’ ‘undeniable,’ ‘serendipitous’ finding is not, in fact, *wrong?*’ (p. 2). Exploratory, in-depth interviews such as those used in the present study produce large amounts of data in non-standard formats that

is difficult to interpret. The potential for much of the richness obtained from this data collection method is often lost in attempts to interpret it (Miles & Huberman). To overcome these problems, this present research study drew from the techniques of analysis provided by grounded theory.

Grounded theory procedures are designed to build explanation. They lay down fairly precise procedures to be followed in relation to each of the stages of the qualitative data analysis process (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2003). The rigour of the techniques of analysis provided by grounded theory offered the researcher a set of clear guidelines from which to build explanatory frameworks that specified relationships among concepts (Charmaz, 2000). These techniques then assisted the researcher to move each step of the analytic process toward the development, refinement, and interrelation of these concepts (Charmaz). Grounded theory's comparative approach and emphasis on process provided excellent strategies for making data analysis efficient, productive, and exciting, without providing formulaic techniques (Charmaz). Although the researcher made use of the grounded theory techniques of analysis, the method was not used in the purest sense as intended by the designers, which is to generate a theory (Glaser, 1978). Reaching the point of producing a complete theory would unduly complicate the research process since a qualitative methodology was sufficient to answer the research problem. In other words, the research was pragmatic, and not purist in its application.

There are different grounded theory approaches to analysing data. It was thus important to be clear and explicit about which grounded theory method was followed in this study. Since the original book by Glaser and Strauss published in 1967 on the grounded theory method, controversy between the authors has surfaced over the procedures involved in the research method (Locke, 1996). The result is that two methodological schools now exist, the Straussian (after Anselm Strauss) and the Glaserian (after Barney Glaser) (Locke). Not only are there differences in style and terminology, but Strauss's version of the method was reworked to incorporate a strict and complex process of systematic coding (Goulding, 1998). Glaser argued that a theory should only explain the phenomena under study, and Strauss insisted on the use of coding matrixes to conceptualise beyond the immediate field of study (Goulding). Glaser required the identification of the research issue to be entirely

dependent upon the perceptions of the researched after the researcher had entered the research site, while Strauss and Corbin permit the researcher to predetermine the general subject of enquiry before entering the research site (Parker & Roffey, 1997).

In this research project, it was necessary to enter the organisation aware that the focus of questioning would be around sustainability of behaviour due to practical application and time constraints. The approach put forward by Strauss and Corbin (1990) thus initially seemed more appropriate from this point of view. In addition, Glaser (1992), Strauss and Corbin agree that the more general frame of reference advocated by Glaser could be difficult to operationalise, whereas Strauss and Corbin outline analytical steps designed to be more specific and more easily operationalised by the field researcher (Parker & Roffey, 1997). The practically oriented and structured method proposed by Strauss and Corbin is a major advantage – offering procedural advice that is more specific than Glaser’s publications, and yet not restrictively prescriptive (Parker & Roffey). Since one of the primary reasons for the adoption of the grounded theory techniques in the present study is the guidance it provides during data analysis, and because Strauss and Corbin offered these guidelines in a very explicit manner, their approach was followed in this research study.

The grounded theory techniques of analysis are designed for analysing data collected by means of semi-structured or in-depth interviews, and were thus suitable for use in the present study (Turner, 1983). The techniques are also firmly located in the qualitative research paradigm (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Using these techniques allowed the researcher to remain true to an inductive research approach without relying on previously developed hypotheses, and provided the needed structure for analysing the data, and ensured that the analysis remained true to this data (Charmaz; 2000; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin; Turner).

These techniques of analysis have, however, been subject to some criticism. Suggestions have been that the means of creating codes and categories from the data in grounded theory research might limit understanding because grounded theorists aim for analysis rather than the portrayal of subjects’ feelings in fullness (Conrad, 1990; Reissman, 1990). However, in the present research these well-described coding

procedures were found to be assessable and useful and were thus very helpful in the analysis of the data. Care was taken to periodically return to the transcribed interviews and ensure that the meaning the participants intended was clear in the results.

The techniques of analysis, which were used to analyse the data obtained from the interviews in the present study, were: (a) the coding techniques to provide structure and guide data analysis, including the use of the paradigm model, and (b) the conditional matrix which guided thought on the context of the present study and the relationship between the context and the phenomenon. In the following section, the coding techniques used to analyse the data are described.

### **3.5.1 Coding**

Strauss and Corbin (1990) provided a series of data analysis steps for grounded theory that could be used to structure data analysis since the data generated by qualitative methods are often vast (Patton, 1980, as cited in Creswell, 1994). Coding represents the operations by which data are broken down, conceptualised, and put back together in new ways (Strauss & Corbin). The analysis procedures of grounded theory were used to help the analyst break through the biases and assumptions brought to, and that may have developed during, the research process, and provided the grounding, built the density, and developed the sensitivity and integrations needed to generate rich, tightly woven explanations that closely approximated the reality that it represented (Strauss & Corbin).

Analysis in grounded theory is composed of three major types of coding which were all used in the present study, namely (a) open coding; (b) axial coding; and (c) selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

#### ***(a) Open Coding***

Open coding is essentially the first stage of the qualitative analysis process (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2003). Open coding involves an analytic process that is concerned with the naming and categorisation of the phenomena through close examination of the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The data was broken down into distinct parts, carefully examined, compared for similarities and differences, and questions were asked about the phenomena reflected in the data (Strauss & Corbin). Codes were

assigned to related pieces of data by subjecting the data to two basic principles of analysis: making comparisons, and asking questions (Strauss & Corbin). This is the origin of the methodology's description as the "constant comparative method of analysis" (Strauss & Corbin, p. 62).

Data was broken down in a process of taking apart each phrase, line, sentence, paragraph, and giving each discrete idea, explanation, or event a name, something that represented or stood for the phenomena (Strauss and Corbin, 1990) This was done by asking questions such as to what category or property of a category an incident related (Glaser, 1992). This coding kept the researcher studying the data (Charmaz, 2000). It allowed ideas to be built inductively since line-by-line coding deterred the researcher from imposing extant theories or her own beliefs on the data (Charmaz). This form of coding helped the researcher remain attuned to the subjects' views of their realities, rather than assume that she shared the same views and worlds (Charmaz). Line-by-line analysis kept the researcher thinking about what meanings participants made of their data, asking questions of it, and pin-pointing gaps and leads in it to focus on during subsequent data collection (Charmaz).

Glaser (1992) criticised Strauss and Corbin's (1990) breaking up of the data as resulting in losing meaning. In the present study, the process did initially seem to splinter the data. However, once these individual codes were reassembled, it allowed the researcher to see meanings that had not been recognised before.

#### ***(b) Axial Coding***

Once the initial open coding was complete, the researcher then recombined the data into core codes (Parker & Roffey, 1997). Axial coding provided the means to identify relationships between open codes for the purpose of developing core codes (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In this way, connections between a category and its subcategories were made (Charmaz, 2000). This included conditions that gave rise to the category, its context, the social interactions through which it was handled, and its consequences (Charmaz). As relationships between categories were recognised, they were rearranged into a hierarchical form with the emergence of subcategories through the use of the paradigm model provided by Strauss and Corbin (1990, as cited in Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2003).



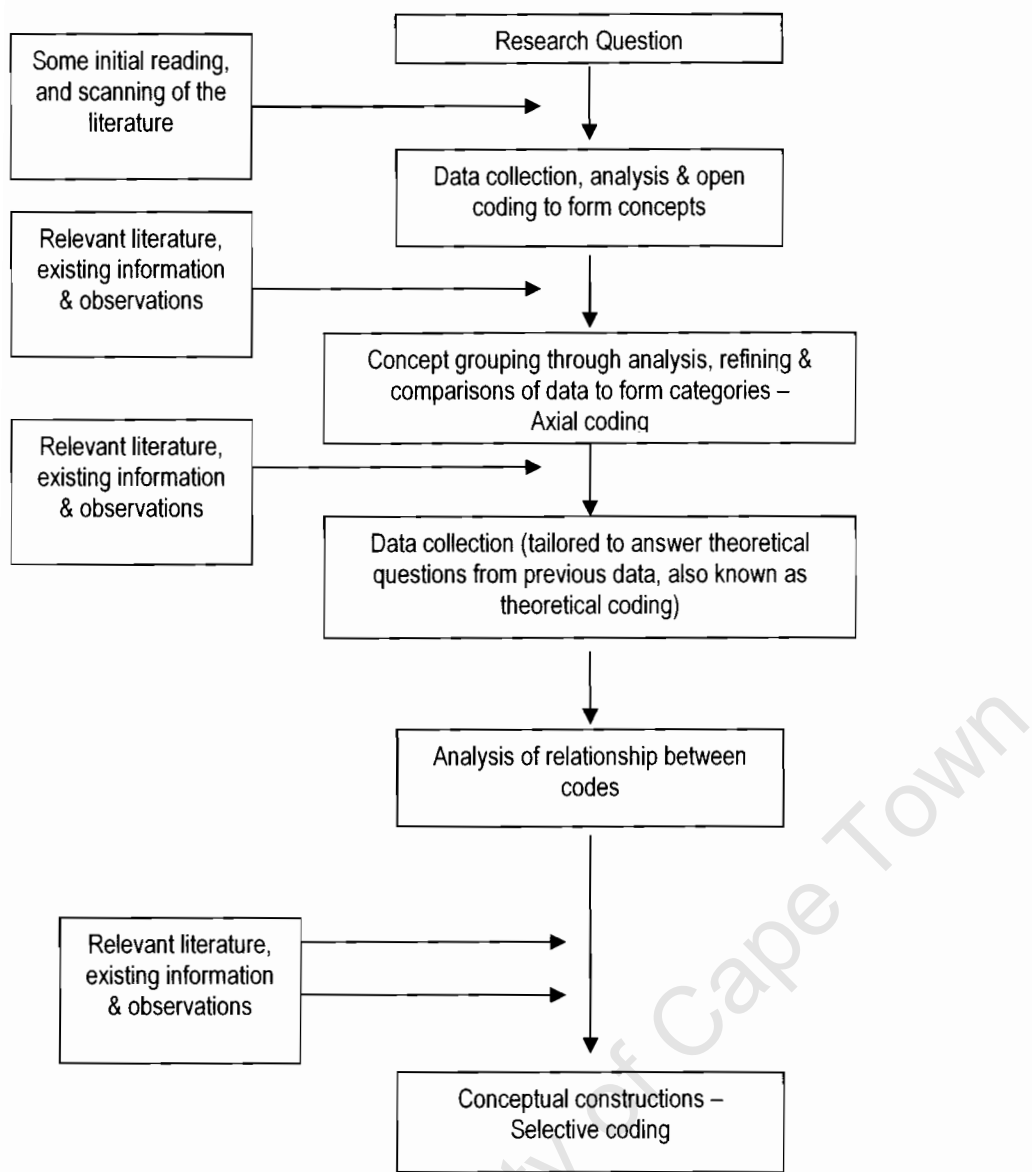
### ***(c) Selective Coding***

Selective coding required the selection of the focal core code – the central phenomenon that emerged from the axial coding process (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In the previous stage, the emphasis was placed on recognising the relationships between categories and their subcategories (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2003). In this stage the emphasis was on recognising and developing the relationships between the principal category that emerged in order to explain what was happening (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill). In this way a theoretical framework was developed showing relationships between the central concept, its conditioning concepts, observed outcomes and any intervening concepts (Strauss & Corbin).

The coding processes did not always occur as isolated occurrences in the present study. There was a constant interplay between data collection and analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The data and emerging themes pointed the researcher to gaps that needed to be filled, next questions to be asked, and next steps to be taken in the research process (see Figure 3.1 for a demonstration of this). As each category took shape, new data observations were compared with the developing properties of the emerging framework (Locke, 1996), and in this way themes were formulated (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). These two comparative processes and further sampling continued until data gathering and comparative analysis yielded no new examples and properties of the conceptual category. This was the point of theoretical saturation (Locke). Once the researcher was sure that valid themes had been generated, the relationship between them was analysed. In this way the study undertaken became more than just a descriptive account or merely the development of themes in the area of study (Strauss & Corbin). Instead, an attempt was made to synthesise, explain and interpret the data (Strauss & Corbin).

Figure 3.1 illustrates the different types of coding in diagrammatical form. Data collection was driven by the research question. The inductive nature of the present study is clear in the diagram. Literature was only sought once the first phase of data collection was underway. Following an inductive approach ensured that the present study adhered to the methodological assumptions inherent in qualitative research.

**Figure 3.1 – Techniques of Analysis of the Grounded Theory Method**



**3.5.2 The Conditional Matrix**

The conditional matrix is an analytical tool provided by Strauss and Corbin (1990) to denote a complex web of interrelated conditions, actions/interactions and consequences that pertain to a specific phenomenon. The conditional matrix assisted the research to be theoretically sensitive to the range of conditions that influenced or related to the phenomenon under study, and to the range of potential consequences that resulted from an action/interaction (Strauss & Corbin).

In the present study, issues of time had an important bearing on the phenomenon under investigation, since the concept ‘sustainability of behaviour’ relates to the existence of a level of behaviours, skills, knowledge or attitudes over time. For this reason, it was necessary to be explicit about contextual conditions at the time of the research, and the influence that such contextual conditions had on the results of this study. The conditional matrix provided the means to document these conditions.

Strauss and Corbin (1990) argued that contextual conditions relate to both the particular set of conditions that pertain to a phenomenon and those wider conditions that impact on such a phenomenon. The conditional matrix is the term used to describe a transactional system denoting a complex web of interrelated conditions, action/interactions, and consequences of a phenomenon. It is represented as a set of circles, one inside the other, each circle corresponding to a different level (Strauss & Corbin). By identifying features within each level that related to the phenomenon under investigation, all of the conditions that influenced the results of this study were mapped out. In Chapter Four, the conditional matrix is discussed in greater detail, along with an application of this analytic tool.

Strauss and Corbin (1990) thus provided techniques of analysis that were used to analyse the data of the present qualitative study, as well as helped map out the contextual conditions which existed at the time of this study. This allowed the researcher to determine the influence of these contextual conditions on the results. Other variables that influenced the results were issues of bias, reliability, validity, generalisability and ethics.

### **3.6 TACKLING QUESTIONS OF BIAS, RELIABILITY, VALIDITY, GENERALISABILITY AND ETHICS**

The following section will briefly discuss the issues of bias, reliability, validity, generalisability and ethics as they related to the research process and findings.

#### **3.6.1 Objectivity/Researcher Bias**

A common problem when working within a qualitative methodological framework is the issue of researcher bias affecting the results of a study (Goodman, 1999). Of concern here is whether the conclusions depend on “the subjects and conditions of the

inquiry,” as opposed to that of the inquirer (Guba & Lincoln, 1981, as cited in Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 278).

The grounded theory techniques of analysis used in the present study greatly assisted in minimising researcher bias. These techniques required that ideas be built inductively, preventing any early reading or the researcher’s views from influencing the study. Line-by-line coding also helped deter the researcher from imposing extant theories or her own beliefs on the data (Charmaz, 2000). This technique was very effective in helping minimise researcher bias, to the extent that the researcher was surprised at what emerged during data analysis. These techniques thus helped to ensure that the results of the study were, as far as possible, a true reflection of the views of the participants in the study and not those of the researcher.

### **3.6.2 Reliability**

Reliability relates to whether the process of study is consistent and reasonably stable over time and across researchers and methods (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2003). In other words, whether alternative researchers would reveal similar information or results (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill).

The goal of this qualitative research study was to find out how respondents constructed meaning and significance in their situations and how they constructed ‘reality’ in the organisational setting. Findings derived from qualitative research are often not repeatable since they reflect reality at the time data is collected, which is subject to change (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Although no two qualitative studies are likely to produce identical results, the researcher took care to ensure reliability by clearly specifying the basic paradigms and analytic constructs because reliability depends in part, on its connectedness to theory (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

### **3.6.3 Validity**

Validity in the context of qualitative research refers to the extent to which the researcher gains access to the participant’s knowledge and experience, and is able to infer a meaning that the participant intended (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2003). The researcher is confident that the results of the present study are valid in that they portray an accurate picture of the area that was investigated and are credible to the

research participants. Care was taken to report the context-rich nature of the descriptions participants gave of sustainability of behaviour. Since questions were made clear to respondents during the interviews and the interviewer probed the meaning of the responses received, validity was increased (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill).

#### **3.6.4 Generalisability**

Generalisability, sometimes referred to as external validity, relates to whether the findings of the research may be applicable to other organisational settings (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2003). The intent of qualitative research is generally not to generalise findings, but to form a unique interpretation of events (Creswell, 1994).

Possible limitations to generalisability of the present study are discussed in Chapter Six (Application), and relate to the fact that although participants were interviewed from varying locations each with unique cultural characteristics, ultimately the information was collected from one large organisation, which could limit generalisability to some extent. Furthermore, the information was collected at one point in time, which is subject to unique contextual conditions that exist only at that time. Finally, the participants in the sample were all from the managerial level of seniority. A sample more representative of the various organisational levels could possibly increase generalisability of the results.

These criticisms aside, in the present study the characteristics of the context in which the research took place (such as the financial services industry) and the processes including data analysis were fully described to permit comparisons with other samples (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Furthermore, a number of the findings in the present study are consistent with prior theory based on research in different settings indicating some convergence between the findings of the present study to those conducted in other settings (Miles & Huberman).

The researcher believes that the broad framework of the model and the major themes that were identified will have a bearing on, and can to some extent be transferred to, other organisational settings.

### **3.6.5 Research Ethics**

The researcher had a responsibility in this study to enhance the truth and trustworthiness of the results yielded. First and foremost, the researcher obliged to respect the rights, needs, values, and desires of the research participants (Creswell, 1994).

The present research study articulated to the participants the research objectives and described both in writing (via email) and verbally how data would be used to ensure that they were clearly understood (Creswell, 1994). Respondents were not pressured to participate in the study, as was evident in the number of individuals who decided not to participate. The respondents were informed of all of the data collection activities, and were assured of their anonymity before the commencement of each interview. Written permission to proceed with the study was obtained from each participant, and before each interview, participants were asked whether they were comfortable with being tape-recorded. A copy of the consent form can be found in the Appendix.

The participants were not harmed in any way by the research study, either physically or mentally/emotionally. They were not asked to reveal embarrassing information or any information that could endanger their homes, jobs, and so forth (Babbie & Mouton, 2001).

### **3.7 SUMMARY**

Exploratory, qualitative research was appropriate to answer the present research question since this area of research had not been fully explored, the research issue was not clear cut and the questions to respondents resulted in complex, discursive replies (Brannen, 1988). Time factors in organisational research were given due consideration since time was an important element that influenced the design and execution of the present research study.

The sampling strategies employed in this study aimed to include those persons, places and situations that provided the greatest opportunity to gather the most relevant data about the phenomenon under investigation (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The sample

consisted of fourteen managers located at four units of a large financial services organisation in the Western Cape.

The qualitative research method offered very few guidelines for the researcher to follow, so the present study made use of the techniques of analysis developed by grounded theory. These techniques provided a means to structure the data and allowed explanations of the phenomenon to emerge only from the data and not the preconceived ideas of the researcher.

Finally, this chapter explained how issues pertaining to bias, validity, reliability, generalisability and ethics were addressed in the present study. The chapter to follow records the findings of the study.

University of Cape Town

## CHAPTER FOUR – RESULTS

### THE MODEL: SUSTAINABILITY OF BEHAVIOUR

*'The presentation of self takes the form of personal narrative when our memories take shape through language'*

- Shaw (1997, p. 302).

This chapter presents the reader with the findings of the study. Strauss and Corbin's (1990) paradigm model was used to guide the analysis and to establish the relationships between core categories from the data. It is therefore a useful guide to structure the results and discussion. Each stage in the paradigm model is identified and briefly explained, followed by a summary of the responses from participants. Direct quotations from individuals are offered in italics in order to illustrate results, enhance the reader's understanding of interviewees' interpretations of what influences sustainability of behaviour, and to ensure that the present study remains true to the lived experience and views expressed by the research participants.

Four major causal conditions for sustainability of behaviour emerged from the data. These are reported in section 4.1, and consist of intrinsic attributes, job characteristics, managerial styles and interview conduct. Various contextual conditions influenced the sustainability of behaviour phenomenon, which are recorded in section 4.2. Section 4.3 addresses the action/interaction strategies taken by participants to sustain behaviour, and section 4.4 identifies the outcomes or consequences of these actions. A summary of this chapter is offered in section 4.5.

#### **The Paradigm Model**

This chapter was structured using the paradigm model designed by Strauss & Corbin (1990). The paradigm model depicts the relationships between categories and subcategories and the conditions relating to the occurrence of a phenomenon (Strauss & Corbin). The paradigm model is composed of:



### Figure 4.1 – The Paradigm Model

**(a) CAUSAL CONDITIONS → (b) PHENOMENON → (c) CONTEXT → (d) INTERVENING CONDITIONS → (e) ACTION/INTERACTION STRATEGIES → (f) CONSEQUENCES.**

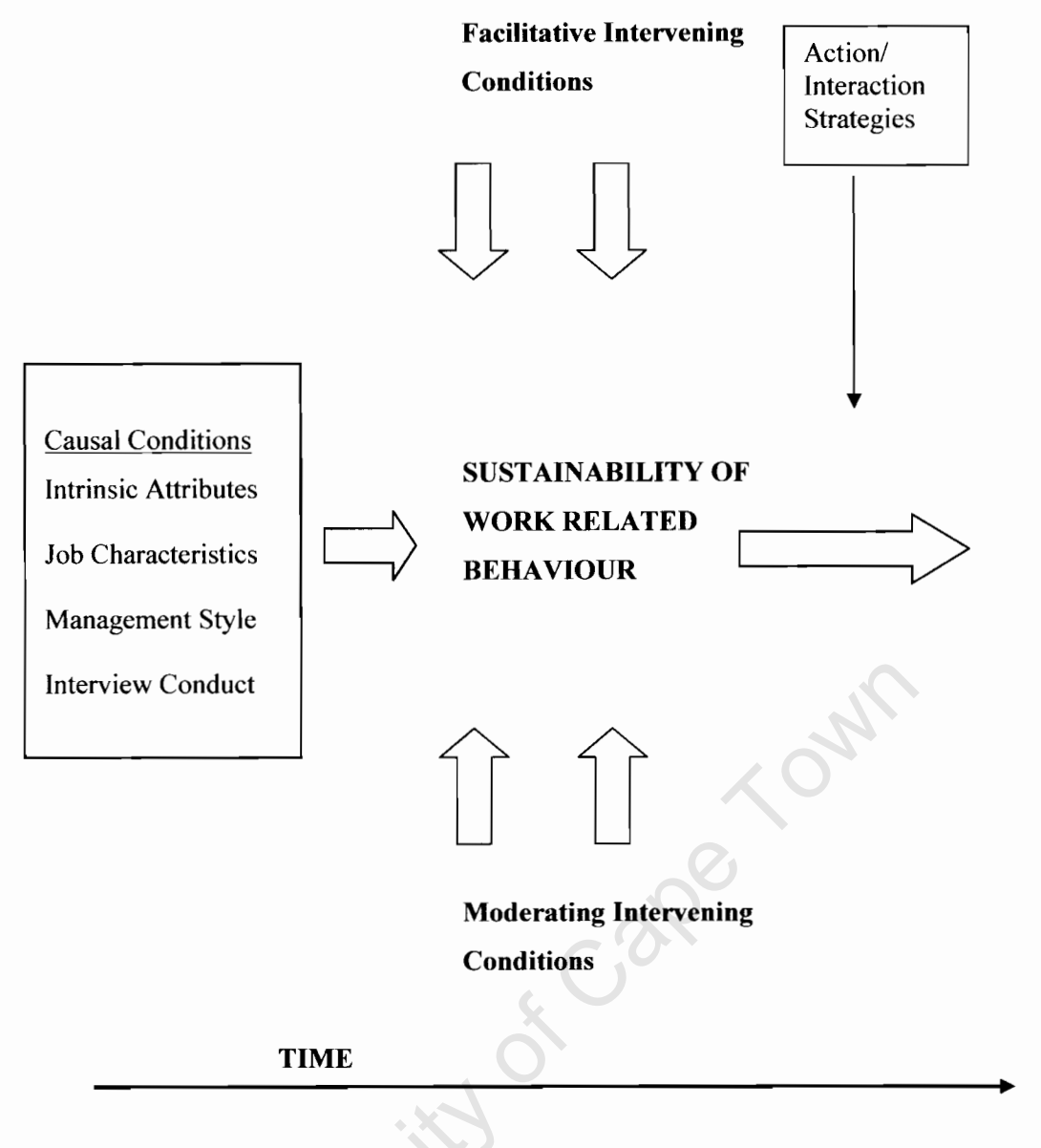
- (a) Causal conditions refer to the factors that lead to the occurrence of a phenomenon;
- (b) Contextual conditions represent a specific set of properties that pertain to the phenomenon, and at the same time are also a particular set of conditions within which the action/interaction strategies are taken to manage, handle, carry out and respond to the specific phenomenon;
- (c) Intervening conditions are the broad and general conditions bearing upon action/interaction strategies;
- (d) Action/interaction strategies relate to the action taken to respond to a phenomenon as it exists in context or under a specific set of perceived conditions; and
- (e) Outcomes or consequences are the results of all of the factors outlined above (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

In the next section, the causal conditions for sustainability of behaviour are documented. The results obtained from participants are depicted diagrammatically in Figure 4.2.

#### 4.1 CAUSAL CONDITIONS

Four broad categories of causal conditions emerged from the data as causing sustainability of behaviour. These categories are intrinsic attributes (4.1.1), job characteristics (4.1.2), management style (4.1.3), and interview conduct prior to entering the organisation (4.1.4).

**Figure 4.2 – Diagrammatic Representation of the Results: The Sustainability of Behaviour Model**



**4.1.1 Intrinsic Attributes**

Without exception, all of the respondents identified some form of intrinsic attribute that caused them to either sustain or not sustain behaviour over time.

Most of the participants identified intrinsic motivation, or the will to achieve, as a characteristic that contributed to sustainability of behaviour. This incorporated a desire to do well and be *‘driven to have success in myself, for myself and for my family’* in their professional, working lives. One interviewee responded when asked what caused them to sustain behaviour over time that: *‘Each person has their own*

*perceptions, values and motives. Either you want to achieve, or you're not going to. You're going to make a success, or you're not going to*'. Another respondent replied: *'I am personally very driven and motivated. I have a strong drive to do well.'* The same respondent even confessed to being *'paranoid about not doing well'*. More than half of the participants who cited motivation as an important intrinsic characteristic also associated motivation with a fear of not doing well in their career.

Many respondents discussed their need to receive recognition for their achievements. They believed that having such recognition contributed to their sense of accomplishment, which in turn influenced them to sustain behaviour over time. As one respondent phrased it, *'a sense of achievement and recognition from my peers... I need others to see my work as important and me doing well at it.'* Respondents discussed how being seen to be doing well in their jobs was an important factor in them maintaining this job-related behaviour. Such external reinforcement from peers and colleagues reinforced their internal need to do well at their jobs. Very few respondents mentioned their family in relation to the need for recognition, which was instead focused predominantly on the perceptions of their managers and colleagues in the workplace.

Another closely related and dominant theme was that of values. Although not always referred to by participants using this term, responses from participants were categorised into this theme using the definition of values developed by Rokeach (1973). Rokeach defined values as learned and determined by upbringing, culture, society, personal experience, etc. They determine attitudes, judgements, choices, attributions, and action (Rokeach). Almost half of the respondents referred to values as being an important determinant to sustain behaviour. Responses included statements such as *'my own perseverance and make-up. This comes from my upbringing and it's in your make-up. It's what's important to you,'* and another replied that *'to perform consistently is something you learn from childhood. It's having a good work ethic.'* Having *'high standards'* was a response from participants included in this category, as well as *'approach to life, your philosophy'*.

Many respondents referred to some form of personality trait that enabled them to sustain behaviour over time. Almost half of the respondents discussed flexibility as

such a trait. Corresponding with this was being able to adapt to change, and openness to experience. They referred to the changing nature of the financial services industry, the culture of change in their organisation and the fact that they had to be able to adapt to change to survive in the organisational setting. When the researcher inquired whether their working environment had changed in any way in the past year, all of the participants responded that it had, and made reference to some form of change.

Responses included: *'Everything has changed. From a year to now, there is not much that I can say has remained constant,'* and *'I have a new boss. My previous boss was go-go-go, let's make money. In fact, my new boss is just leaving, so that is changing again.'*

An additional personality factor that emerged from the data analysis was the *'feeling that you can change things,'* in other words, an internal locus of control. Participants described how having an internal as opposed to an external locus of control enabled them to sustain behaviour over time. Participants believed that if they could change the things around them, they would be more inclined to sustain behaviour. A small number of participants also commented that self-awareness was a personality characteristic that had an important bearing on sustainability of behaviour. Being aware of their job-related interests, strengths and weaknesses allowed them to seek job positions that would sustain their interest over time, and in this way ensure, to a greater extent, that they sustained behaviour over time.

Finally, personality characteristics such as being a perfectionist (or having a high achievement orientation), conscientious, trusting, having perseverance or persistence and not allowing their work lives to spill over into their personal lives - *'leaving work at work'* were mentioned by individual participants in the present study as causally influencing sustainability of behaviour. By being a perfectionist, respondents described approaching every task with the view to producing excellent results.

Respondents who referred to this characteristic set high standards for themselves to achieve, which included sustaining a certain level of behaviour over time. By being conscientious, individuals felt responsible for maintaining a level of behaviour, by being trusting of others allowed participants to trust that, for example, subordinates would do what was asked of them, allowing them to focus on their own task responsibilities. Being perseverant and persistent ensured an achievement orientation,

while being able to leave their work at work afforded them a balance between work and home life which was found to be conducive to sustainability of behaviour over time.

Only a few participants attributed unsustainability of behaviour to intrinsic characteristics. No two respondents referred to the same characteristic. Respondents discussed some attributes which were direct opposites to the intrinsic characteristics reported as causing sustainability of behaviour, namely not being flexible and therefore not being able to adapt to change, and being too perfectionistic. By too perfectionistic, respondents referred to spending too much time worrying that their work output was of a high enough standard as to be unproductive. In addition, having self-doubt and low self-esteem were mentioned as causing individuals not to be able to sustain a level of behaviour over time.

Figure 4.3 provides a diagrammatical representation of the sustainability of behaviour model highlighting the intrinsic attributes discussed by respondents that causally influenced sustainability of behaviour. The section to follow (4.1.2) documents the job characteristics which were found to cause sustainability of behaviour.

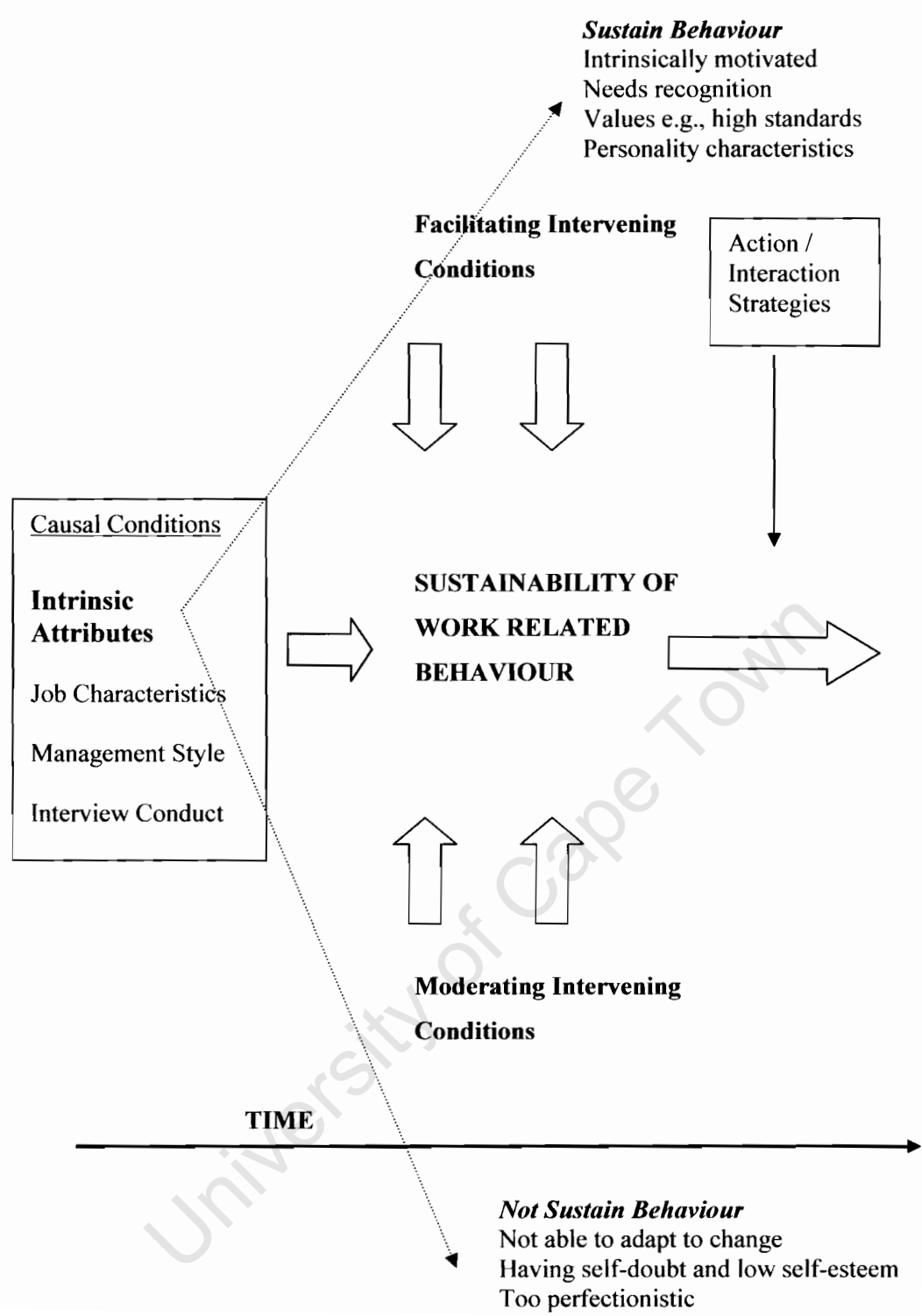
#### **4.1.2 Job Characteristics**

All of the participants in the present study discussed some form of job characteristic that causally influenced the ability to sustain behaviour over time. The most common response was having clear job related goals and expectations, i.e., goal clarity.

Responses included statements such as *‘my ideal circumstances are having clear goals and deliverables, and to be left to get on, knowing what’s expected of me, what I need to do, and achieve’*, *‘knowing what you have to do, within a certain time period, and also, knowing what is expected of you’*, and *‘having clear goals and expectations, having a clear understanding of what is expected of you and what you need to do’*.

What was interesting to note was when asked whether their work had such clear job-related goals and deliverables, all of the participants replied that it did not, or was not as clear as they would have liked.

Figure 4.3 – Intrinsic Attributes that Cause Sustainability of Behaviour



The need for clear job-related goals and expectations was linked to the need for autonomy, as having clear expectations allowed participants to structure their work as they chose. Respondents described a need for a balance between being able to personally create structure in their working lives and having some autonomy, while at the same time also having an overall, guiding structure that dictated what was expected of them in terms of the goals and objectives of the organisation. Most respondents reported that they did not feel they were afforded the necessary structure/autonomy balance to enable them to sustain behaviour over time.

A few respondents cited their performance contract as having some bearing on sustainability. The organisation set performance targets for each individual employee, which was periodically reviewed. In this way, employees were measured on how their performance related to what was required of them. *'We all have performance contracts so you have a guideline of what you are required to do and achieve on a monthly basis, and that definitely effects whether you maintain your performance over time'*. Participants thus described a feeling of obligation to meet their performance contracts, which influenced them to sustain a certain level of behaviour over time.

Some participants discussed how having variety and challenge in their jobs influenced sustainability. They described how *'my job keeps me interested. No day is the same, there are a lot of different challenges every day. I think that keeps me on my toes and keeps me interested.'* They discussed how they enjoyed having different challenges in their work.

A final job characteristic mentioned by a small number of participants was pressure or deadlines that had to be met as a factor which influenced sustainability. One respondent described how *'I'm driven if I'm under pressure. If there is no pressure then I don't perform, so maybe the environment that I'm in is good for me as a person'*. Not all of the participants described the pressures in their jobs in a positive light. Several participants discussed how pressures on the job causally influenced unsustainability of behaviour and in this sense was opposite to the abovementioned statement. Other themes mentioned as causing unsustainability of behaviour that were

opposite to those causing sustainability of behaviour were not having clear job-related deliverables and not having a balance between structure and autonomy in their roles. Additional themes were daily interruptions, and not being able to achieve work-related goals quickly enough and thus not *'moving forward quickly enough'*.

Figure 4.4 diagrammatically depicts the job characteristics discussed by respondents as causally influencing sustainability of behaviour. Management style was the third theme discussed by respondents as having a causal influence on sustainability of behaviour.

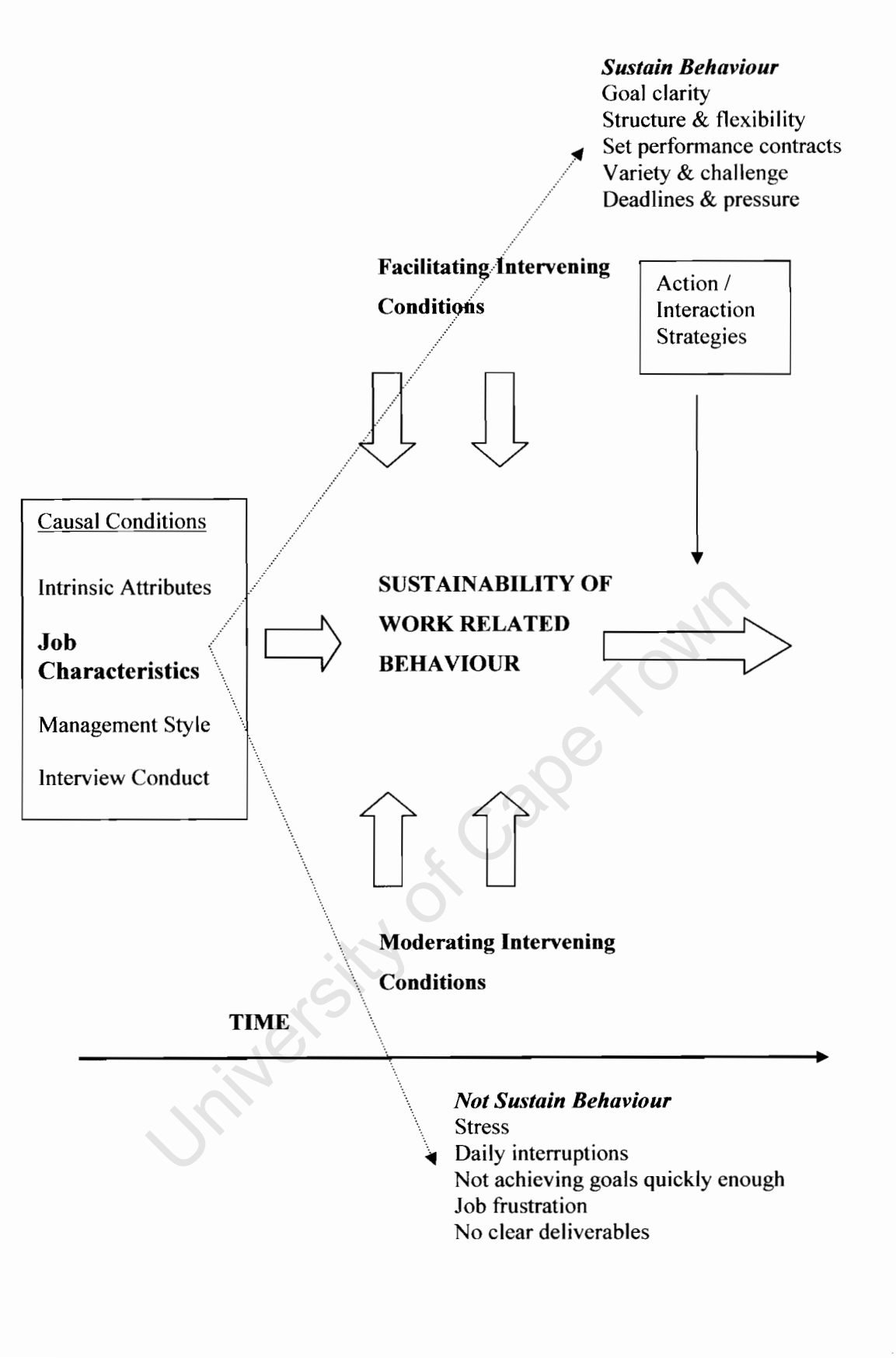
#### 4.1.3 Managerial Style

Most participants commented extensively on managerial style as a causal condition for sustainability of behaviour. The most common managerial style cited was a combination of *'being left to do my own thing'* and *'when I encounter obstacles, to go to my manager on an ad hoc basis and have some time with him'*. In other words, participants described the need for a combination of managerial *'support and buy-in,'* when they required assistance, as well as trust and autonomy from their respective managers to allow them to work unsupervised. Responses included statements such as *'I don't like to be micro-managed'*, and *'to give me time when I need it'*.

Another dominant theme reported by most of the participants was the need for their respective managers to be clear about goals and expectations, particularly in relation to the strategic direction of the organisation. Most of the participants expressed a need to be well informed of what was required of them in the form of performance-related deliverables, as well as how such goals and expectations related to the *'broader picture'*, i.e., the organisation-wide goals and objectives. Participants were very clear, however, that this support from management be in the form of periodic meetings to keep such employees updated, and not frequent checks. They did not want managers to check on every task completed, but rather to be clear about what was expected, and then to be left alone to decide how to complete objectives. This same theme emerged in the job characteristics category as it is closely related to management style.



Figure 4.4 – Job Characteristics that Cause Sustainability of Behaviour



Managers are responsible for relaying the goals and objectives of the organisation and in this way dictate what is expected of participants in the form of performance related deliverables. Not having clear goals and deliverables in their work is a direct result of managers not communicating these expectations to the extent that respondents require. This has an impact on the degree of autonomy in their work which was a necessary job characteristic for sustainability of behaviour. Respondents conveyed their frustration at not having clear goals and deliverables: *'most leaders describe what is expected of you but down the track they say that this is not what they expected. This feels like you're wasting your time, it causes frustration'*. A few participants attributed this *'lack of clear goals'* to their increasingly senior position within the organisation: *'I think the higher you go in the organisation, the less clear-cut stuff is. It's just one of those things'*. Others related this to a lack of, and need for, effective communication.

Participants discussed how communication causally influenced sustainability: *'to communicate with people. Where they are going as people and where the business is going'*. One respondent spoke of poor communication: *'people communicate something once and they expect people to run with it instead of having check points, evaluation and continuous feedback'*. Since the participants all had different managers at the time of the research study, variance between management behaviour and style could account for some participants expressing the need for more autonomy and others for closer checks and assistance.

Almost half of the respondents expressed the requirement that managers provide *'constructive feedback'* regarding work-related functioning and to give recognition when something was done well. They described how they valued input from their respective managers, but that such input should be *'constructive'* and *'formal'*.

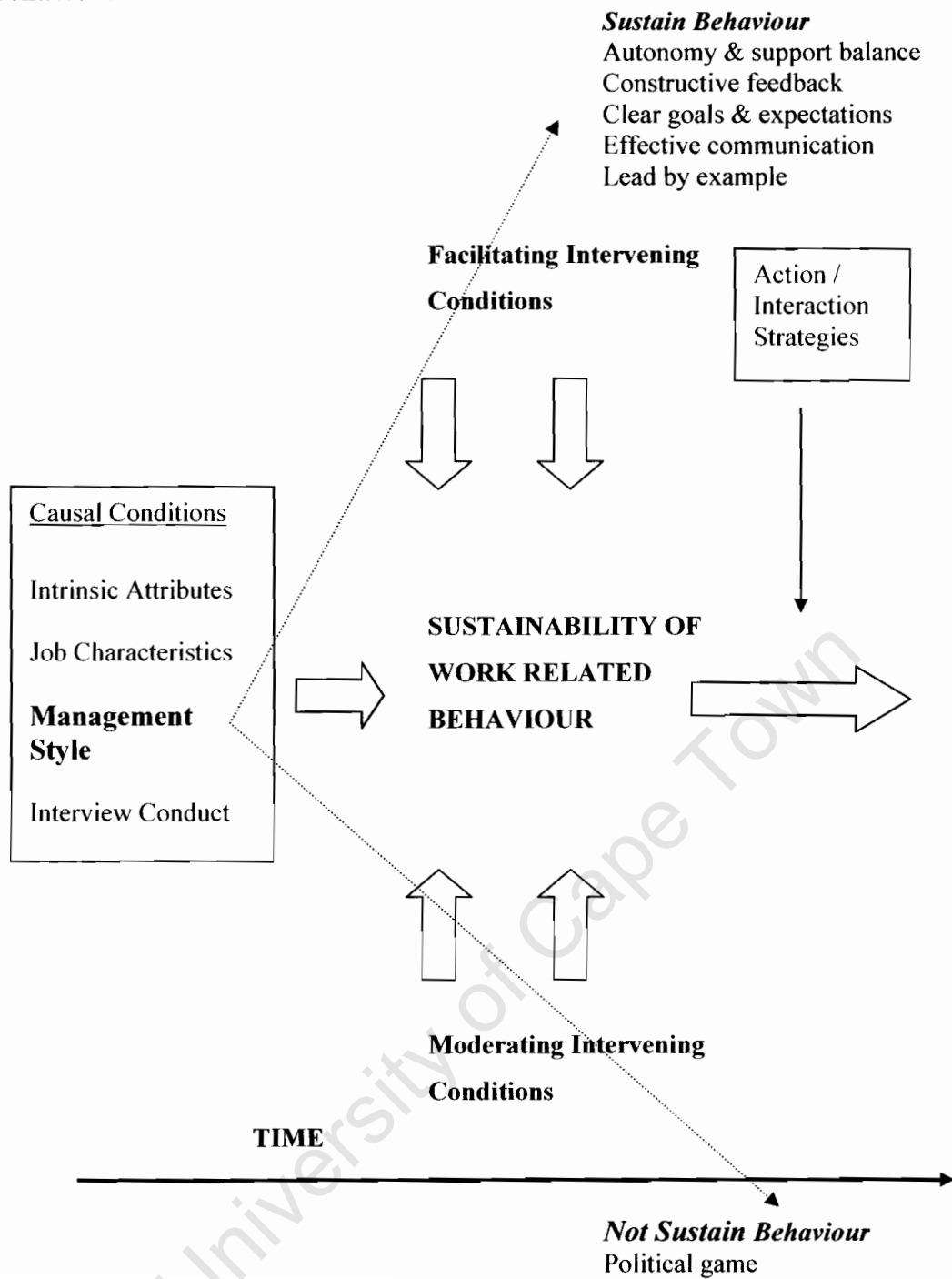
A few participants expressed the need for their leaders to *'lead by example'*, *'don't tell me what to do and you're not doing it'*. These respondents commented that managers should *'lead from up front'*.

Over half of the participants volunteered what they termed *'management playing the political game'* as a factor that hindered them from sustaining behaviour over time,

and expressed strong views on the subject. *'The type of leader that I work well under is someone who keeps their eye on the ball and doesn't play the political game'* and *'one of the major things would be the politics involved in a big organisation like this.'* When probed about what they meant by *'the political game'*, respondents spoke of managerial behaviour such as altering behaviour according to the audience *'I like someone who says one thing one day... they don't change their views on a topic according to the audience or what you want to hear'*. They referred to senior managers having found a certain way of *'doing business'*, and being unwilling to change that. They described how some senior managers were afraid that a junior employee could negate their way of doing things, and to prevent this, they attempted to maintain the status quo. As one participant phrased it, *'people build their own empires in an organisation like this, and hold on to that. I might find a more efficient way of doing things that may save the business money and add to the bottom line, but still they'd rather protect their empire than let go of that'*. Some participants referred to individuals in the organisation behaving in certain ways in order to get 'power' – *'this gives people power'*. *'You get to a certain level there is a lot of games you have to play and that's not my forte, I don't like saying things in a certain way just because someone wants to hear that'*.

Management style was therefore reported as causally influencing sustainability of behaviour. Figure 4.5 provides a diagrammatical representation of managerial style as a causal condition for sustainability of behaviour. The final causal condition that emerged from the data analysis was interview conduct, which is outlined in the section to follow.

**Figure 4.5 –Managerial Style as a Causal Condition for Sustainability of Behaviour**

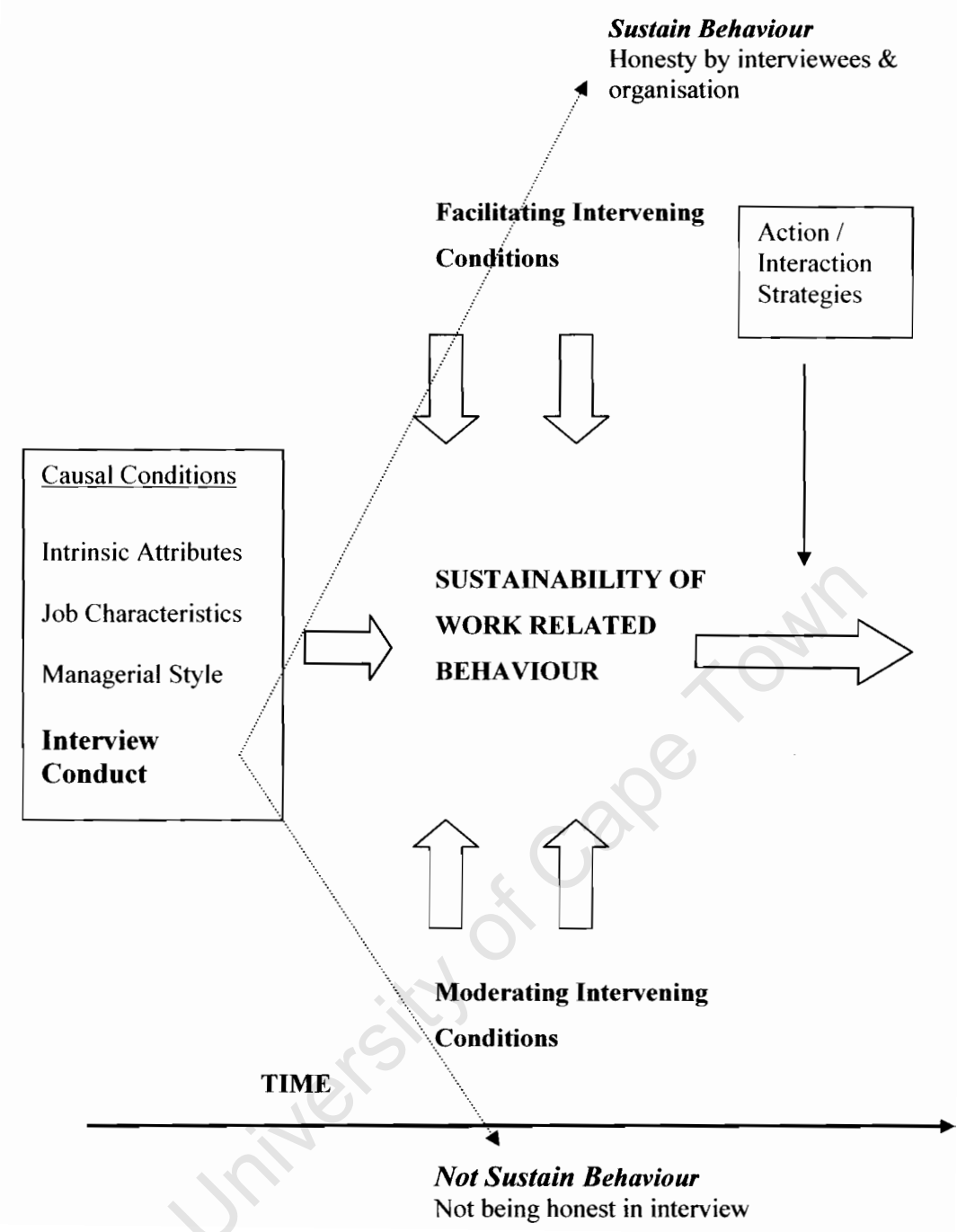


#### 4.1.4 Interview Conduct

Half of the participants in the present study referred to the interview situation, prior to entering the organisation, as a causal factor that determined the sustainability of work-related behaviour. Participants discussed being open and honest about capabilities in the interview to avoid not being able to effectively perform and sustain work-related behaviour when on the job, as well as the organisation being clear about its expectations from such employees to avoid employees becoming de-motivated when these expectations are not met. Participants described how, in interviews, people generally showed their best attributes, and would most likely answer what the interviewer wished to hear, and visa versa. When expectations based on an interview did not materialise, they felt de-motivated as the job did not turn out the way that they had expected. Honesty in the interview situation, both by the interviewer and interviewee, causally influenced whether work-related behaviour was sustained or not.

Figure 4.6 provides a diagrammatical representation of interview conduct as a causal condition for sustainability of behaviour. Causal conditions are those conditions that cause sustainability or unsustainability of behaviour. The data analysis indicated that intrinsic attributes, job characteristics, managerial style and interview conduct had a causal influence on the ability to sustain behaviour over time. According to the paradigm model developed by Strauss and Corbin (1990), contextual conditions influence the very context in which interactions occur.

Figure 4.6 – Interview Conduct as a Causal Condition for Sustainability of Behaviour



## 4.2 CONTEXTUAL CONDITIONS

When considering the context of sustainability of behaviour in this setting, it may be argued that the contextual conditions are much broader. Conditions such as a third world country in transition and the progressively competitive financial services industry also represented the context of this phenomenon and had a bearing on the results. For this reason, the recommendations made by Strauss and Corbin (1990) were followed which allowed this study to consider the wider contextual conditions as well as those immediately recognisable as having an influence on the phenomenon.

A context represents the specific set of properties that pertain to a phenomenon; that is, the location of events or incidents pertaining to a phenomenon (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). It is also 'the particular set of conditions within which the action/interaction strategies are taken to manage, handle, carry out, and respond to a specific phenomenon' (Strauss & Corbin, p. 101). In the following section the wider contextual conditions at the time of the present research and the impact of these conditions on the phenomenon are documented using the conditional matrix provided by Strauss and Corbin.

### **The Conditional Matrix**

A set of contextual conditions exists at a particular point in time that affects the ability to sustain work-related behaviour. The conditional matrix developed by Strauss and Corbin (1990) enabled the researcher to map out these contextual conditions as well as demonstrate how they related to the phenomenon.

All of the conditions causing, providing the context for, or influencing the sustainability of behaviour phenomenon can be thought of as a 'transactional system,' i.e., they are interactive in nature (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 159). Every action or interaction is embedded in a wide set of contextual conditions. Strauss and Corbin refer to the transactional system as a conditional matrix, denoting a complex web of interrelated conditions, actions/interactions, and consequences that pertain to a given phenomenon. The conditional matrix may be represented as a set of circles, one inside the other, each (level) corresponding to different aspects of the world that existed around the participants (Strauss & Corbin). In the outer rings are those conditional features most distant to action/interaction (see Figure 4.7), while the inner rings

pertained to those conditional features bearing most closely upon an action/interaction sequence (Strauss & Corbin).

Conditions at all levels are relevant to a study, with each level possessing properties of time (through temporality) and place (location within the matrix) (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Regardless of the level within which a phenomenon such as sustainability of work-related behaviour is located, that phenomenon will stand in a conditional relationship to levels above and below it, as well as within the level itself (Strauss & Corbin). A diagrammatic depiction of the conditional matrix looks as follows:

**Figure 4.7 The Conditional Matrix (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 163).**





From analysing the data, it became clear that contextual conditions in all of the levels in the conditional matrix had a bearing on the sustainability of behaviour phenomenon.

### ***International Level***

The outermost level may be thought of as the international level (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Certain international contextual conditions were found in the present study to influence sustainability of behaviour.

A few participants described how working on a global platform influenced their ability to sustain behaviour over time. They described how the output of a work project often involved input from employees in the United Kingdom and countries abroad before it could be completed. In order to maintain behaviour, these participants needed timely information from these international locations, without which they could not complete certain tasks.

Intense competition was a frequent theme cited in the present study, which included conditions such as South African organisations competing internationally. With South African organisations operating on a global platform, organisations are expected to remain competitive despite an increase in the number of competitors in each sector. To sustain a competitive advantage in these conditions, organisations rely on their employees to sustain the necessary competencies over time. International level contextual conditions thus had a direct bearing on the results of this study, and on sustainability of behaviour.

### ***National Level***

The second level may be regarded as the national level (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Its features include governmental regulations, history, values, economics, problems, issues, and so forth (Strauss & Corbin). In South Africa, there have been significant changes, not only to legislation, but also to the way businesses operate and how people work. For example, current legislation in South Africa such as the Employment Equity Act (1998) prescribes that previously excluded racial and ethnic groups be incorporated into organisational structures, forcing organisations and

individual employees to learn to adjust to a diverse workforce. All of these changes and adjustments impact on employee behaviour in the workplace.

Many participants discussed the significant amount of change in their working environment. They reported changes in the workplace as having a negative effect on their ability to sustain behaviour. They described how these changes created uncertainty in their jobs, which was aggravated by the poor levels of employment in South Africa. As one participant phrased it, *‘at the moment it is quite difficult to get jobs...’*. A combination of insecurity and uncertainty, significant levels of change and the lack of jobs in South Africa influenced the attitudes of participants toward their employment.

### ***Community Level***

The community level included all of the above items but, in relation to sustainability of behaviour in the present context, as they were influenced by the financial services community.

Several respondents referred to the conditions of financial markets as influencing their work-related behaviour: *“not knowing, uncertainty hinders me from sustaining behaviour. [Company name] has gone through uncertain times, financial markets as they are, seem to be coming back of late. But not knowing where you are going...”*. The financial services industry was very competitive at the time of the research; participants described working in the industry as very demanding, and it being *‘a tough field’*. *‘We’re in a competitive, changing environment, so we need to be constantly coming up with new ideas, but at the same time, offering the same service’*. Several participants described the high expectations on individual performance: *‘one needs to deliver, there are expectations. Those things make you fearful’* and *‘now with all the deadlines... that adds pressure’*. With the financial services industry in which the participants worked being very competitive, it placed many demands on the employees who work in such an industry. The conditions of the financial markets thus had an impact on the work-related behaviour of participants since they needed to adjust such behaviour to *‘offer the same service’*.

### ***Organisational Level***

At the organisational level, all of the respondents in the present study described the culture of change in the research organisation: *'yes, there are big changes'*, *'there is a lot of change'*. Participants lamented that the culture of change in the organisation influenced the amount of certainty in their work. Working in an organisation that constantly changed to adapt to conditions in the marketplace required that employees be flexible in relation to their work. The result was that they could not be certain of their work-related goals and expectations since these changed so rapidly. The comments made earlier by participants that their managers did not provide enough goal clarity and direction could perhaps thus be attributable to the fact that with the organisational environment changing so rapidly, communication of the organisational goals and direction was made difficult. In this way, the organisational context stood in a conditional relationship to the ability of participants to sustain behaviour over time.

Mixed results emerged from the study in relation to participant attitudes towards working in an environment of constant change. Some expressed the need for variety and challenge in their work and accepted the significant amount change in the context. Others described a need for stability, structure and having clear goals and deliverables to meet, thereby minimising the uncertainty that accompanied significant change.

A few participants described how working for one of the most prominent financial services organisations in South Africa influenced sustainability of behaviour.

*'Knowing that [organisation's name] is on top of the pile, leader of the pack, needs to deliver, there are expectations'*. The organisation having a *'high performance culture'* was found to leave certain participants questioning whether they had enough *'go in you'* to cope. Some participants admitted to periodically checking their motivation levels to determine whether they were motivated to maintain work-related behaviour in such a high performance culture - *'you need to assess - do you need more motivation?'* Motivation emerged as a causal condition in the data analysis of the present study. Organisational contextual conditions thus influenced the results of the study, and the sustainability of behaviour phenomenon.

### ***Sub-Organisational / Sub-Institutional Level***

This level included the peculiar features of the sub-locations within the larger location where the study took place (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). As mentioned before, the present study was conducted in a large financial services organisation that is spread over several locations. The research participants worked in either the organisational 'main building' (Site 1), or in one of several additional locations in the Western Cape area (Sites 2, 3 and 4).

Each organisational site was found to have a unique working culture. Participants working in Site 1 believed that they were working for the most successful division of the organisation. They described how the motivational and human resource projects for the entire organisation were modelled on their site since they were so successful. The participants appeared very business-like in their dress and style of address in the interviews. Respondents often referred to how busy they were at work, how important the work that they were doing was for the success of the organisation, and the limited amount of time at their disposal.

The culture at Site 3 appeared more relaxed. They were less concerned with time pressures and deadlines. Their dress was less formal and business-like in comparison with the other locations. The attitudes of participants working for this organisational unit was unique in that employees were observed to congregate in the entrance foyer and have what could be described as light-hearted, casual conversations on the sofas. Here they were found to be discussing their personal lives, such as what each other had done on a particular weekend and evenings on the town. There was much thoroughfare in the foyer. As an employee passed through, they greeted others as if they were personal acquaintances (such as kissing on the cheeks and hugging), rather than what is traditionally associated with business conduct. This attitude also emerged in the interviews. Several of the participants were late for interviews while others postponed them after the researcher had already been waiting for some time.

Site 1 and 4 appeared to have a similar working climate, comprised of a strict work ethic and orientation. The only noticeable difference was that on several occasions, it was mentioned by interviewees that working for Site 1 made them feel more 'part' of the business, and more closely aligned to the organisational strategy. Both Sites 1 and

4 were different from Sites 2 and 3 in that they did not convey an ‘air of superiority’ that was found to exist in Site 2, or the relaxed, casual attitude of Site 3.

Working in these varying cultures influenced members to adhere to certain cultural behaviours. These determined work-related behaviour to the extent that participants working in Sites 1 and 4 were noticeably more stressed and concerned with their work-related performance in comparison with those working in Sites 2 and 3.

### ***Collective, Group and Individual Level***

The next level is the collective, group and individual level, which included philosophies, knowledge and experience of persons as well as those of groups (e.g., professional groups) (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). On the individual level, one of the participants discussed how his approach to life / his philosophy influenced sustainability: *‘to me it is little philosophies in life, if you can stick to those, then generally your behaviour should remain the same’*.

Collective, group and individual level conditions also related to the impact that others in the contextual environment had on the work-related behaviour of the research participants. A few participants described the influence of colleagues on work-related behaviour: *‘you might see somebody who does really well, and get promoted or moves through the ranks, and you might aspire that way and change your behaviour. It’s more a matter of looking at those around you, whether it’s a negative or positive influence, I think it definitely influences the way you work’*.

Most of the participants described office politics as negatively influencing sustainability. Office politics are discussed in section 5.1.3 of Chapter Five since they are closely related to the behaviour of senior management, and are thus included in the section of the study concerned with managerial style.

### ***Interactional Level***

By interaction Strauss and Corbin meant people doing things together or with respect to one another concerning a phenomenon, and the action, talk and thought processes that accompany doing those things (1990).

Participants described how effective communication was necessary to obtain information from managers and colleagues, which enabled them to sustain a level of behaviour over time. As one respondent phrased it, '*communication is very important*' (when asked what enabled him to sustain behaviour over time). Another participant discussed how a lack of communication contributed to people in the organisation not sustaining behaviour over time, '*communication is needed on what is expected*'. A context that is conducive to effective communication was thus necessary. If such an environment did not exist, employees would not be able to obtain the necessary information to fulfil their roles, and thus sustain behaviours over time. Interactional contextual conditions were thus found to be related to the sustainability of behaviour phenomenon.

The conditional matrix provided by Strauss and Corbin (1990) is a powerful analytic tool for capturing the many conditions and consequences bearing upon a given phenomenon. By tracing the conditional and consequential paths through the different matrix levels, one can determine how each level is relevant to the phenomenon through their impact upon action/interaction (Strauss & Corbin). In this way, it was possible to document situational variables that existed at the time of the study. Other factors that influenced the phenomenon are those that Strauss and Corbin refer to as 'intervening conditions'.

#### **4.3 INTERVENING CONDITIONS**

Intervening conditions relate to the broader structural context pertaining to a phenomenon. They serve either to facilitate or constrain the action/interaction strategies taken within a specific context (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Without exception, all of the respondents referred to the 'culture of change' that existed in the research organisation, and the consequences of such a culture. The ability to adapt to change emerged as an important personality characteristic needed to be able to sustain behaviour over time, but the change context also dominated as an intervening condition that influenced the effectiveness of various action/interaction strategies taken by participants to sustain a level of behaviour over time. With the organisation constantly changing, it was felt that communication of the direction and focus of the organisation to all employees in such a large organisation became very

difficult, inevitably resulting in many members being unsure of such direction. *‘Not knowing where we are going... we need to deliver, there are expectations...’*. From analysis of the data, it was clear that the culture of constant change had a direct bearing on the work-related behaviour of the participants. One respondent discussed how *‘changing the goalposts when I’m halfway through a project...make me do something different, there is something left unfinished which I was enjoying, I am not happy...it is demoralising. You don’t have a sense of progress. But I suppose you have to deliver what the business requires’*. From his discussion, it became clear that this participant would be better motivated if allowed to complete projects, as opposed to leaving them unfinished. However, respondents conveyed that they understood why a culture of change was necessary for such a large organisation as it enabled it to be flexible and change projects as and when clients or the marketplace demanded.

One respondent postulated that the research organisation was too large to adapt quickly enough to the rapid changes required by the marketplace, resulting in it being reactive, rather than proactive. *‘The rate of change has gone faster and faster, so five years ago you could predict a year in advance, but eventually you get to a point where you cannot predict at all what is going to happen, you reach a point that instead of being proactive, you have to be reactive. Maybe we are there! Maybe for an organisation the size of [company name] which is like a big dinosaur, we can’t react quickly enough to changes’*. The interviewee discussed how the research organisation often implemented new ‘projects’, but did not sustain these projects over time. These projects, driven mostly by senior management and the human resources department, consisted of attempts to, for example, carve out a new set of values for the organisation by which employees were expected to abide (a recent initiative). Subsequent interviews with respondents revealed that all but one of the remaining interviewees agreed with this view, i.e., that the organisation itself did not sustain projects through to completion, and in this way behaved unsustainably.

Most of the participants cited insufficient resources as a condition that either facilitated or constrained the ability to sustain behaviour. Time, financial and information resources were reported. With regard to time resources, employees described how they needed to meet certain deadlines for projects that they felt they were not given enough time to complete. Some participants mentioned how they

worked longer hours to compensate for insufficient time resources. One participant admitted to taking only one day of rest from work (Sunday), and working late *'I work until 10:30 [PM] some nights'*.

The lack of time resources often emerged as a consequence of poor informational resources: *'We've got to launch in two weeks time. Up to date, I don't have all of the information I need. It's not available, its things that somebody in the U.K. has to build a portion of, etc. The sources of information are very wide'*. With regards to financial resources, one respondent described the following financial dilemma: *'You have to produce a product which they didn't plan for in advance. If you have to recruit new people, that costs money, but they didn't budget for that.'* A lack or availability of these resources served to either aid or constrain sustainability behaviour.

An additional intervening condition that emerged from the data was the point in time in which behaviours took place (for the individual and for the business). For instance, the state of the financial markets and the competitive nature of the business influenced sustainability of behaviour because they influenced work-related behaviour. One participant described how the ability to sustain behaviour at a particular point in time was determined by what requirements the business had at such a time, such as a period in which a new product was launched, or the production of their annual reports. For the individual respondents, the point in time in their careers, family lives, etc. was also discussed as impacting on their ability to sustain behaviour. As one respondent phrased it: *'It's a whole lot of factors that I believe affect the way you feel about things and how you react to things. Having recently gone through a divorce, I have my kids every second week-end, and all these factors affect what you are thinking about and how you react to things at a particular time'*.

The physical work environment of the participants was also reported as an intervening factor. Almost half of the participants referred to the physical layout of the offices. Some described the open-plan layout as disruptive and affecting productivity *'I think the design or layout of the open plan offices are very disruptive. I think that everywhere I go, every nook and cranny, it affects productivity, the noise levels!'* and *'the design doesn't really enhance productivity and concentration. It's very disruptive'*. Other respondents felt that the open plan layout was necessary, but



depended on the role of an employee in the organisation: *'I get a lot more work done in my own office, if it was open plan, I wouldn't be as productive. But it depends on your role. For instance, for a desktop support person, four walls would be a barrier. A person in sales support needs to be easily accessible, they shouldn't be allowed to close a door'*. A few respondents even felt that the open-plan layout was conducive to productivity: *'you're closer to people and I find I can shut down and concentrate'*.

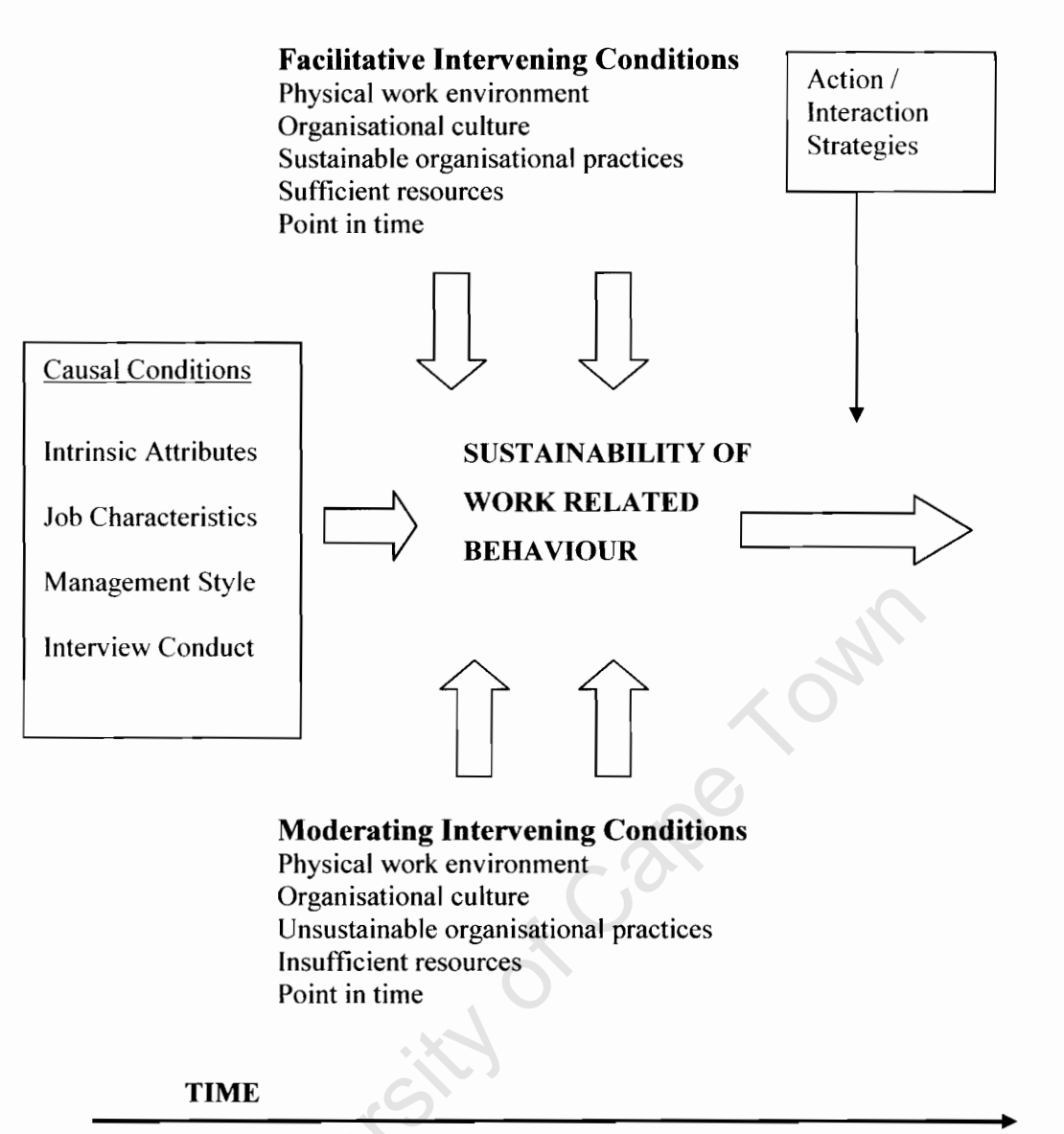
Several intervening conditions thus emerged from the data which either facilitated or constrained action or interaction. Figure 4.8 highlights the influence of intervening conditions as they influence sustainability of behaviour. The section to follow documents the various action/interaction strategies taken by participants to sustain behaviour over time. It is to these strategies that attention will next be focused.

#### 4.4 ACTION/INTERACTION STRATEGIES

When studying individuals, groups, or collectives, there is an action/interaction which they take to manage, handle, carry out, or respond to conditions that exist in the organisational context or under a specific set of perceived conditions (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Five action or interaction strategies emerged from the data analysis. Respondents revealed that they kept periodic checks on personal motivation levels, created structure by setting themselves clear goals and tasks to achieve, made conscious attempts to communicate their needs and expectations to their respective managers, and learned to adapt to change, or left.

Some participants explained that in order to sustain behaviour over time, they periodically checked their personal motivation levels to ensure that they were sufficient to maintain their level of work performance. Thereafter they would consciously adjust their motivation levels accordingly.

**Figure 4.8 – Diagrammatic Representation of the Results Highlighting the Influence of Intervening Conditions**

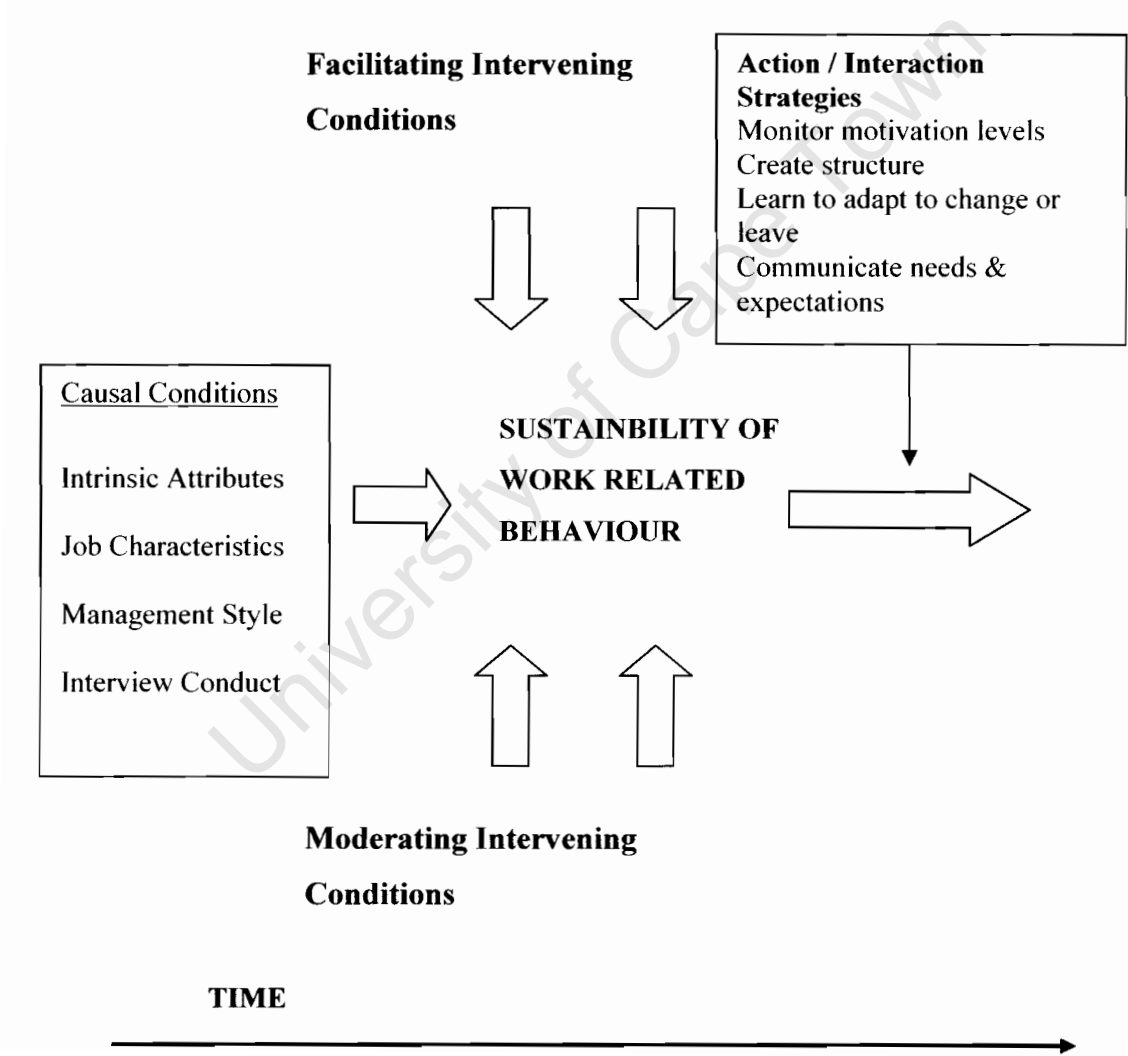


Across the sample, participants described their work situation as uncertain and highly changeable. Many of the respondents described how, in order to overcome the lack of goal clarity and the amount of uncertainty in their work, they rigorously set goals and tasks for themselves to achieve in an attempt to create some structure. A few respondents felt they either had to learn to adapt to change, or leave the organisation: *‘you need to accept change, otherwise you’re not going to survive here’*. One respondent even described how she had to *‘brainwash yourself to the extent to which you start feeling comfortable with it [change] after a while and then you live that’*.

Two respondents admitted to having handed in their resignation, and were in the process of leaving the organisation.

Respondents in the present study described how they had made a conscious attempt to communicate their needs and expectations to their respective managers so that these needs could be met, thereby reducing the influence of poor communication on their ability to sustain behaviour over time. Participants in the present study thus undertook several action/interaction strategies to sustain behaviour. Figure 4.9 provides a diagrammatical representation of these action/interaction strategies. The results of these factors were several outcomes of consequences, which are discussed in the section to follow.

**Figure 4.9 – Diagrammatic Representation of the Results Highlighting Action/Interaction Strategies**



#### **4.5 OUTCOMES OR CONSEQUENCES**

The actions of the participants in the present study all had different consequences. The central most important consequence, which was the focal point of this study, was whether or not they sustained behaviour over time.

Sustainability of behaviour relates to maintaining a predetermined minimum level of knowledge, skills, attitudes or behaviours continuously for the duration of employment in an organisational setting. Not to sustain such effort, knowledge, skills or behaviour resulted in the specific dimensions of work-related behaviour not being: continuous over time, at their peak, being modified according to the level of resistance, and not occurring in the organisation setting (i.e., organisational exit).

Sustainability of behaviour has different consequences depending on the set of intrinsic attributes of the individual, the job characteristics of their work, the management style of their respective manager, their interview conduct as well as the conduct of the interviewer, intervening conditions and action/interaction strategies which all exert an influence on the outcome.

#### **4.6 SUMMARY**

This chapter recorded the results obtained in the present research as derived from qualitative interviews conducted with individuals working in a financial services organisation. The results were structured using the paradigm model designed by Strauss and Corbin (1990). Data analysis revealed that intrinsic attributes, interview conduct, job characteristics, management style, contextual conditions, intervening conditions and action/interaction strategies were all variables in the sustainability of behaviour model. Whereas this chapter documented the results of study, the following chapter compares and contrasts these results with prior literature and research in the field.

## CHAPTER FIVE - DISCUSSION

*‘Everything has changed. From a year to now, there is not much that I can say has remained constant’*

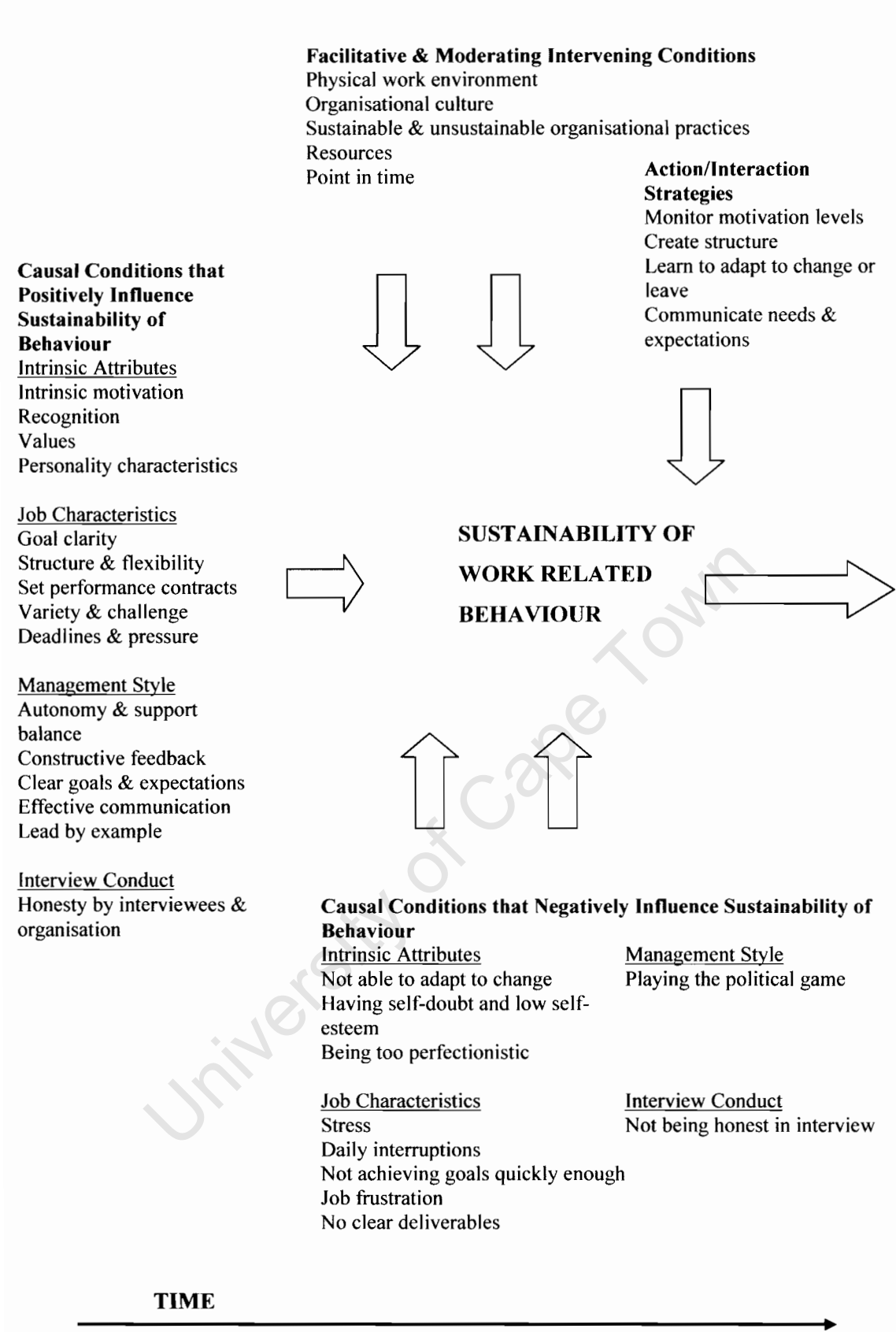
- Participant Response.

This chapter offers a discussion of the results obtained in this study. It is divided into two sections: section 5.1 is structured according to the sustainability of behaviour model that emerged from analysis of the data. This section begins with the provision of a framework in which to contextualise the discussion, before analysing and comparing the results with existing literature and research. Section 5.2 considers the holistic, multi-dimensional nature of this proposed model, and the influence of change on the findings. A summary of the chapter is offered in section 5.3.

### 5.1 THE SUSTAINABILITY OF BEHAVIOUR MODEL

Industrial and organisational psychologists in the South African business arena noticed that when an organisation wished to draw certain knowledge, skills, attitudes or behaviours from its pool of human resources (that had been identified in exercises such as assessment centres), these previously identified competencies were often not accessible. The results of this study revealed that several factors exerted an influence on whether or not employees sustained behaviour in the workplace. Many of these factors are shown in the present chapter to be supported by literature that found a causal relationship between such variables and work-related behaviour. However, it became apparent that these variables were interrelated, and unlike prior research to date, that they all exerted an influence on sustainability of behaviour and could not, in isolation, fully account for this phenomenon. The findings of this study were thus found to be connected in significant ways, and need to be understood as a dynamic, integrated model for understanding sustainability of behaviour in the contemporary workplace. Figure 5.1 provides a diagrammatic representation of these findings.

**Figure 5.1 – Diagrammatic Representation of the Variables that Influence Sustainability of Behaviour**



Employees were found to sustain a level of competence identified by the organisation in the presence of certain intrinsic attributes, job characteristics, managerial styles and interview conduct. In addition, intervening conditions and action/interaction strategies served to moderate or facilitate the ability to sustain behaviour over time. What emerged from analysing the results of this study was that sustainability of behaviour was a consequence of a combination of these factors. This finding was first noticed when an interrelationship was discovered between the various causal conditions for sustainability of behaviour.

### **5.1.1 Causal Conditions**

The factors that led to the occurrence of the phenomenon were labelled causal conditions (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The findings clearly showed that intrinsic attributes, job characteristics, management style and interview conduct all contributed to participants being able to sustain behaviour over time.

#### ***Intrinsic Attributes***

Intrinsic attributes emerged from the data as causing respondents to either sustain or not sustain behaviour over time. Intrinsic motivation, the need for recognition, values and personality traits such as the ability to adapt to change, an internal locus of control, self-awareness and conscientiousness were discussed.

#### **Motivation**

Participants in the present study reported that intrinsic motivation caused them to sustain behaviour over time. Intrinsic motivation is an innate need for competence and self-determination (Deci & Ryan, 1991). Self-determination relates to an issue of choice, as opposed to a participant doing something because they feel pressured to do it (Deci & Ryan). Participants who reported being intrinsically motivated derived a feeling of competence from accomplishing work-related tasks which produced a feeling of efficacy, rather than purely financial rewards (Deci & Ryan). The intrinsic needs for competence and self-determination motivate an ongoing process of seeking and attempting to conquer optimal challenges – i.e., something that requires stretching one's abilities (Deci & Ryan). Intrinsically motivated individuals sustained a level of motivation since what they sought was the attainment of competence in all of their endeavours. Each time they are presented with a new problem or obstacle, they self-

determinedly seek to be competent in relation to such an obstacle, directing effort at mastering each new challenge. This explains participants referring to the strategy of periodically checking their motivation levels to assess whether they were motivated enough to sustain behaviour. There was thus a connection between this causal condition and action/interaction strategies in the sustainability of behaviour model.

For intrinsic motivation to occur, however, a task must offer some opportunity that meets a person's inner needs (Bumpus, Olbeter & Glover, 1998). An intrinsically motivating task will include clear goals for what needs to be done and provide immediate feedback for noting process (Amabile, Hill, Hennessey & Tighe, 1994). This causal condition is thus significantly linked to job characteristics discussed by participants such as clear goals and expectations, as well as a managerial style that comprised feedback, indicating the interrelated nature of the model. Without these conditions, intrinsic motivation could not occur and does not, in isolation, account for the sustainability of behaviour phenomenon.

Theories of intrinsic motivation have uncovered a strong causal relationship between intrinsic motivation and the behaviour of individuals at work (Peterson & Ruiz-Quintanilla, 2003). Sustainability of behaviour relates to maintaining a predetermined minimum level of knowledge, skills, attitudes or behaviour throughout employment, the combination of these competencies determine work behaviour. Such research therefore supports the finding in this study, i.e. that intrinsic motivation has an influence on work-related behaviour. In a workplace, as the environment demands, the tasks that an employee is expected to perform change. As a new task is presented to a worker, those who are intrinsically motivated will seek competence in that task, thereby maintaining a certain level of effort, knowledge or behaviour despite such a change.

Intrinsic motivation is encouraged in autonomy-supportive conditions and where an individual has the necessary resources to do well (Bumpus, Olbeter & Glover, 1998). Once again, the interrelatedness of this causal condition and other variables in the model such as the intervening condition of sufficient resources and the management style of autonomy became apparent. This causal condition has thus been found to be connected to facilitative and moderating intervening conditions, action/interaction



strategies, job characteristics and managerial style in the sustainability of behaviour model. Intrinsically motivated behaviour, or behaviour motivated by the need for competence, was linked to and may explain the need for recognition described by many respondents in the present study.

### Recognition

Respondents described how being recognised for their accomplishments by their respective managers and colleagues in the workplace contributed to them feeling a sense of achievement, and was a causal factor in them sustaining work-related behaviour over time. One way respondents received such recognition was through feedback sessions from their respective managers.

Recognition and feedback activates motivation in two ways: by keeping behaviour goal-directed and by stimulating effort (Peterson & Ruiz-Quintanilla, 2003). When individuals directly compare how they have performed to their own understanding of task requirements, feedback is said to come from the task (Peterson & Ruiz-Quintanilla). Participants feel that they are performing well in relation to a task and they therefore are motivated in this regard. Their task-related behaviour, it is felt, is effective and competent. This influences them to maintain such effective task-related behaviour over time. Feedback from consequences can also come from others, such as a supervisor comparing a subordinate's performance with that of others (Peterson & Ruiz-Quintanilla). If an individual is rated as performing well in relation to colleagues, a sense of recognition for their accomplishments is achieved, which contributes to them sustaining such behaviour over time. The recognition thus gives them a sense of accomplishment and competence, and feeds intrinsically motivated individuals to continue doing well, maintaining their behaviour in relation to expectations, and upholding the view of their competence.

Recognition for work-related behaviour was found to be closely related to intrinsic motivation and a management style comprised of feedback, but some form of external reinforcement was also linked to this phenomenon. These individuals were found to derive intrinsic satisfaction from achieving competence in a task or overcoming an obstacle, but this intrinsic satisfaction was linked to being seen to be doing well, which gave them a sense of, and reinforced their personal beliefs of competence. Such

intrinsic motivation did not thus solely depend on intrinsic reward for it to be sustained.

Participants in the present study described how feeling competent and receiving recognition in relation to their competence led to them sustaining effective work-related behaviour over time. A further intrinsic attribute which was reported as causing sustainability of behaviour was values.

### Values

Participants in the present study discussed how values were important determining factors for sustainability of behaviour. In order to analyse work values systematically, Elizur (1996) distinguished between various modalities of outcome. Various work outcomes were classified as being of a material nature, such as pay or direct practical consequences, such as benefits (Elizur). They were also classified as those that were not of a material nature, such as interpersonal relations, which were affective rather than material, as well as items which were classified as cognitive rather than affective or instrumental, such as interest, achievement, responsibility and independence (Elizur). When analysing some of the causal conditions identified in the present study, i.e., recognition, being responsible for the outcomes of work, and being left to set goals and objectives independently, two things were noticeable. Firstly, respondents referred only to the cognitive classification as instrumental to them sustaining behaviour. Factors such as interest, achievement, responsibility and independence all emerged from the data. These were found in the present study to be dependent on the existence of recognition, which necessitates some interaction with people, and are thus linked to the affective modality of interpersonal relations with people. In other words, cognitive modality outcomes were important for sustainability of behaviour, but relied on the affective modality of interpersonal relations in order to be achieved. Secondly, values emerge as interrelated with several of the other causal conditions that emerged from the data. A certain set of cognitive values was found to underlie many of the other causal conditions identified in the sustainability of behaviour phenomenon. For example, being able to determine job tasks independently from a respective manager and independence in the value classification are of the same concern. There was also a link between this causal condition and the need for recognition mentioned before, since cognitive modality outcomes relied on the

affective modality of interpersonal relations in order to be achieved. What became evident was that these items could not be separated. It was not enough to look for a single causal factor, or combination thereof to account for the complex nature of sustainable behaviour since the causal conditions which emerged from the present study were found to be interrelated. The sustainability of behaviour model therefore needs to be understood as a dynamic model which is multi-dimensional in nature.

Another intrinsic attribute that emerged from the data as having a causal influence on sustainability of behaviour was certain individual personality characteristics.

#### Personality and Work-related Behaviour

The finding of this study was that the existence of certain personality traits was a causal condition for sustainability of behaviour. There is a long history of research that relates personality to work behaviour, as certain personality traits have been found to provide a person with a predisposition to behave in certain ways (Robertson & Callinan, 1998). Studies of personality were thus consulted to determine whether they could explain the relationship between personality and sustainability of behaviour found in the present study.

Personality measures have been found to predict job behaviour fairly well in the literature (Tett & Burnett, 2003). Recent studies of personality and work-related behaviour have focused on five key traits, known as the “big five”, that have been identified as the major factors underlying human individual differences in personality that influence work-related behaviour (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Robertson & Callinan, 1998; Tett, Steele & Beauregard, 2003). These five personality factors are: extraversion, emotional stability, agreeableness, conscientiousness and openness to experience (Barrick & Mount).

The five key personality traits found to influence job-related behaviour support the findings of this study. Respondents described the same personality traits identified in the five-factor model as causing sustainability of behaviour. The responses included personality traits such as: perfectionism, perseverance and maturity (which all fall within the conscientiousness dimension of the five-factor model); the ability to control emotions (emotional stability); trusting (agreeability or likeability dimension);

and the ability to adapt to the culture of change in the organisation (openness to experience dimension).

Despite the five-factor model being questioned regarding its value in predicting job related behaviours (Tett, Steele & Beauregard, 2003), these personality factors were found to cause sustainability of behaviour in the present study. The finding of this study was that if an individual had certain personality traits such as perseverance and maturity, as and when their job-related functions changed, they would be more likely to sustain a certain level of knowledge, skills, attitudes or behaviours despite such changes.

Personality theories based on trait factors recognised that underlying traits were not the only influence on behaviour (Robertson & Callinan, 1998). They also recognised that situations people were in, such as job design, supervision, work colleagues, reward structures, and so on, also played a role (Robertson & Callinan). Factors such as job characteristics and managerial style were also found in the present study to exert a causal influence on sustainability of behaviour.

### ***Job Characteristics***

Participants in the present study reported that the job characteristics they experienced causally influenced their ability to sustain or not sustain work-related behaviour over time. Participants repeatedly expressed a need for clear job-related goals and expectations. The finding that job characteristics influenced work-related behaviour is supported by previous research. Hackman and Oldham (1976, as cited in Hackman, 1991) developed a job characteristics model which demonstrated the relationship between job-related variables and job-related behaviour. This model can be used, to some extent, to understand this relationship which emerged in the present study.

Hackman and Oldham (1976, as cited in Hackman, 1991) proposed a model in which five core job dimensions created three critical psychological states that, in turn, led to a number of beneficial personal and work outcomes (Hackman). These five task or job characteristics were skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and feedback (Hackman, 1991; Peterson & Ruiz-Quintanilla, 2003). These core job dimensions created experienced meaningfulness of the work, experienced

responsibility for outcomes of the work and knowledge of the actual results of the work activities (Hackman; Peterson & Ruiz-Quintanilla). The resultant personal and work outcomes, according to the model, were high internal (intrinsic) work motivation, high quality of work performance, high satisfaction with the work and low absenteeism and turnover (Hackman; Peterson & Ruiz-Quintanilla).

There was convergence between the findings of the present study and the model proposed by Hackman and Oldham (1976, as cited in Hackman, 1991). All five of the core job dimensions put forward in Hackman and Oldham's model were mentioned by participants in the present study. Participants reported that having job variety and challenges causally influenced sustainability of behaviour (skill variety). They also discussed that being able to see projects through to completion had a positive effect on sustainability of behaviour (task identity), and highlighted the importance of their roles to the effective functioning of the organisation (task significance). Having autonomy in their roles and the importance of feedback as it related to job related behaviour also emerged as factors that influenced sustainability of behaviour. All five of the core job dimensions proposed by Hackman and Oldham thus supported the findings of this research, i.e., that job characteristics influenced subsequent work-related behaviour. In contrast, however, the present study found that job characteristics in isolation could not comprehensively account for such subsequent job-related behaviour. They were linked in a multi-dimensional manner to other variables such as intrinsic attributes and managerial behaviour that were also uncovered as causal conditions for sustainability of behaviour. For example, in the job-characteristics model, clear information about the effectiveness of employee performance was found to influence work-related behaviour. Hackman and Oldham do not, however, account for the influence of managerial behaviour as it influences the receipt of such clear information, or moderating intervening conditions such the organisational culture of change which restricted the amount and availability of information required to keep participants informed of their performance in relation to organisational goals at a point in time. As such, they do not adopt a holistic approach to account for the multitude of variables that play a role in influencing subsequent work-related behaviour.

Employees therefore need congruent and clear goals in addition to factors such as variety, scope, a sense of contributing, and feedback (Wilsey, 1995). However, an employee cannot have clear expectations of roles and responsibilities without effective interaction with supervisors or managers who provide feedback on their job related functioning. Job characteristics and intrinsic attributes cannot thus be separated from managerial style as causal conditions for sustainability of behaviour.

### ***Managerial Style***

The finding of this study was that managerial style was a causal condition for sustainability of behaviour. The result of the present study at first appeared to contradict findings in sociological and universal theory, which have argued that little difference of performance variation in a business unit can be attributed to the influence of the managerial style of the manager (Slater, 1989). However, when considering the interrelated nature of the variables found to influence sustainability of behaviour, this study supported such a view in that managerial style in isolation did not account for the sustainability phenomenon. A combination of managerial styles and various other causal, intervening and action/interaction strategies determined whether behaviour was sustained or not. Participants described the need for managers to provide a combination of support, trust and autonomy to enable them to structure their own jobs (job characteristics and managerial style) as well as recognition for achievements (an intrinsic attribute), indicating a reciprocal relationship between the constructs.

What was interesting to note was that participants expressed the need for a combination of both explicit direction in the form of clear goals and deliverables, as well as autonomy in the form of unsupervised work. Most literature on management styles use the distinction between an autocratic and democratic style developed by McGregor (see Nowicki & Summers, 2003). This is because McGregors's Theory X and Y is perhaps the best known differentiation on how people manage (1960, as cited in Denison, Hooijberg & Quinn, 1995). McGregor argued that we either espouse Theory X and reject Theory Y, or visa versa (Denison, Hooijberg & Quinn). The interviews with participants revealed a view contrary to the mutually exclusive explanation provided by McGregor, i.e., that they were able to exercise both self-direction and control, and be directed by their respective managers. This finding

indicated that contemporary workplace behaviour may need a different kind of management style for the present day workforce (Simonsen, 1999). Simonsen made some suggestions for contemporary management that concur with the findings of the present study. She argued that today, managers need to coach their employees. By this, she meant that, contrary to traditional managerial behaviour, managers need “more listening than telling” (p. 49). It was the finding of this study that participants did not like to be too closely directed in their work-behaviour, and would benefit from an environment in which their different motivations, work values and capabilities were recognised. Simonsen recommended that managers give feedback at certain checkpoints, both positive and corrective. Participants in the present study discussed how they required constructive feedback from their respective managers at set intervals. Simonsen also suggested that managers have the responsibility to help translate organisational issues and direction to their departmental level so employees can plan their development accordingly, necessitating that managers have current information about organisational direction. This too was discussed by participants as a necessary prerequisite for sustainability of behaviour, namely, the need for clear goals and expectations in line with organisational direction. Contemporary workplace behaviour thus necessitates a change in how employees are managed, which dictates a shift away from traditional management styles such as those espoused by McGregor.

Participants attributed not having clear goals and deliverables to a lack of communication. Sullivan (1991) argued that what a manager said to an employee affected employee behaviour, highlighting the importance of communication in the relationship between an employee and his/her manager, and subsequent employee behaviour. Research has found that if workers’ knowledge of specific, difficult goals is developed, they tend to do better than if they are given no goal information or vague information (Locke, 1978, as cited in Sullivan). Workers seek knowledge to reduce uncertainty, and they perform better if they are informed by supervisors (Sullivan). The amount of change in the organisational environment was found to hinder the ability of managers to keep participants continually informed of their goals and deliverables because they changed so rapidly, preventing the development of participant’s knowledge of organisational goals. The ability of managers to provide the participants with clear goals and expectations is thus, in part, dependent on the context within which they work, which is dominated by a culture of change.

Managers need to communicate the goals and expectations of the organisation as clearly and regularly as possible since it influences subsequent employee behaviour such as sustainability.

A further finding in this study was the need for constructive feedback from managers regarding work-related functioning. Despite the availability of prior research concerning the “acceptability” of positive or negative feedback, few empirical studies have directly investigated the impact of feedback on the subsequent behaviour of employees in the work situation (Pearce & Porter, 1991). The participants in this study reported that constructive feedback from their respective managers was a causal factor for sustainability of behaviour, indicating the need for future research to support the causal relationship found in this study between constructive feedback and work-related behaviour.

An important construct, namely, office or organisational politics, emerged from the data as having a causal influence on sustainability of behaviour. Most participants in the present study described office politics as a factor that hindered them from sustaining behaviour over time. When probed as to what they meant by office politics, what surfaced was a description of certain senior managers maintaining a bureaucratic mind-set and changing their points of view to suit the audience (Block, 1987). Politics in an organisation are basically negative processes (Block; Poon, 2003). They are “forces in the organisation that support bureaucracy and make the internal entrepreneur a rare species” (Block, p. 5). Organisational politics has been known to result in employee withdrawal from the provision of information and ideas (Gilmore, Ferris, Dulebohn & Harrell-Cook, 1996). Participants described how members of senior management attempted to maintain the status quo with which they were comfortable. In this way, they protected their positions from younger members of staff, who, despite perhaps having more innovative or efficient ways of doing business, were prevented from contributing.

Playing the political game is generally meant when referring to conventional corporate politics, such as manipulating situations and, at times, people, becoming calculating in the way relationships are managed and living with the belief that in order to get ahead, one must be cautious in telling the truth (Block, 1987; Poon,



2003). Participants in the present study admitted to consciously maintaining this political game. They reported that the political behaviour of senior management encouraged them not to be too innovative so as to disrupt the way things are done. In this way they participated in the political game by maintaining the status quo.

Political behaviour is generally not sanctioned by the organisation (Gilmore, Ferris, Dulebohn & Harrell-Cook, 1996; Poon, 2003; Valle & Witt, 2001). Employees within the organisation were indirectly coerced into maintaining a bureaucratic structure, while the organisation publicly denounced such an approach and encouraged a flatter organisational structure coupled with lower-level empowerment. This presented a paradox – participants were expected to make important decisions and take responsibility, which translated into them doing well in their positions, but at the same time, they were expected not to ‘*rock the boat*’ or make decisions that went against those of senior management, even if they were better for the overall performance of the organisation. Withholding information from decision makers so that one may be viewed as a “team player” are common political behaviours (Valle & Witt). This is detrimental to the organisation as it jeopardizes individual and organisational goals (Valle & Witt). Organisations are using mechanisms such as flattening the hierarchy and empowerment in attempts to maintain effectiveness and efficiency (Steers & Porter, 1991). If employees are being prevented from publicising potentially effective solutions to organisational problems, this could negatively influence the success of such strategies.

The results of the present study revealed frustration and helplessness at this contradiction, as office politics was found to negatively influence the ability to sustain behaviour over time. Frustration at the powerlessness created by the political game influenced employees to lose motivation in their roles, and eventually to them not sustaining work-related behaviour over time. Learned helplessness theory recognised that as individuals experienced uncontrollable events they showed performance and behavioural deficits in subsequent tasks (Zimmerman, 1990). Such theory therefore supported the findings of the present study as it influenced work-related behaviour.

Politics has been found to occur under conditions of uncertainty and ambiguity (Gilmore, Ferris, Dulebohn & Harrell-Cook, 1996). The amount of change in the

organisational environment could be contributing to the amount of politics reported by participants in the organisation as such change creates uncertainty and ambiguity in the work of employees. This behaviour is thus connected to the context within which participants work in the sustainability of behaviour model. To enable participants to sustain behaviour over time, managers need to avoid playing the 'political game'. Instead, a true culture of empowerment and entrepreneurial spirit should be encouraged by placating employee fears and anxieties and increasing the value placed on information sharing.

Several factors associated with managerial style in the organisational setting emerged as causal conditions for sustainability of behaviour in the present study. However, the overriding finding was that managerial style was not sufficient to cause the sustainability or unsustainability of work-related behaviour. A combination of managerial style, intrinsic attributes and job characteristics were causal factors for sustainability of behaviour. Honesty in the interview situation also determined, to a large extent, whether expectations upon entering the organisation were sustained over time or not.

### ***Interview Conduct***

The finding of this study was that the behaviour of both the interviewer and the interviewee in the interview determined whether behaviour was sustained during employment with an organisation. In particular, an interviewee was required to be honest about their capabilities in the interview, and the interviewer about job-related expectations.

There has been contradictory evidence as to whether the provision of realistic, as opposed to overly positive, descriptions of a job to potential employees is beneficial for organisations and individuals or not (Meglino, Denisi & Ravlin, 1993). A substantial number of reviews and meta-analyses have indicated that realistic job previews generate higher levels of job satisfaction, organisational commitment, job performance and retention (McEvoy & Cascio, 1985; Roth & Roth, 1995; Wanous, 1992; Wanous, Poland, Premack & Davis, 1992). Indeed it was the finding of this study that honesty was required on the part of both the interviewer and interviewee in the interview setting, advocating the use of realistic recruitment practices for

subsequent sustainability of behaviour in a job. However, writers such as Irving and Meyer (1994) demonstrated that many previous studies, including many of those included in Wanous et al.'s 1992 meta-analysis are methodologically flawed, thereby challenging previous findings.

Studies have thus found conflicting results as to whether or not realistic job interviews determine subsequent job behaviour or not (Meglino, Denisi & Ravlin, 1993). What interview practices have tended to do is view interview data independently from other potential influencing variables, such as organisational context. This study has found that interview practices are only one causal factor which had a bearing on subsequent employee behaviour such as sustainability, and that such practices in combination with certain intrinsic attributes, job characteristics and managerial style caused subsequent job behaviour in an organisational setting. This could explain some of the variance and discrepancies within and between studies that have been conducted on this recruitment method.

Strauss and Corbin's (1990) paradigm model of grounded theory demonstrated that a phenomenon has certain causal conditions, and also that such a phenomenon is influenced by various contextual conditions.

### **5.1.2 Contextual Conditions**

The present research study occurred at a particular point in time which influenced the responses received from the research participants, and thus provided the researcher with a snapshot of reality as found at such a point in time. Any follow-up studies would need to take into consideration the unique factors that existed at the time of this study, and how these influenced the results. For these reasons, the following section details contextual considerations.

Strauss and Corbin (1990) provided an analytic tool to capture the many conditions and consequences bearing on a phenomenon under study called the 'conditional matrix'. The conditional matrix possesses the properties of time (through temporality) and place (location within the matrix) (Strauss & Corbin). Using the conditional matrix, each conditional path was traced through the different matrix levels to

uncover how each level related to and influenced this study conducted in a competitive South African financial services organisation.

At an international level, South Africa is characterised by the ending of capital and trade sanctions after decades of apartheid rule resulting in competitive forces intensifying as foreign investors return to the South African market (Davies, 1995, as cited in Oldenboom & Abratt, 2000). The result has been a struggle to respond and compete with global competition, new technology and productivity pressures (Horwitz, Bowmaker-Falconer & Searll, 1996). Competing on a global platform has required that organisations be flexible enough to adapt to changes in the marketplace in order to keep up with competition. In particular, human resource flexibility is required. Employees need to adapt and enhance their skills to perform well in changing conditions, but at the same time sustain a level of competence during these changes. At the time of the present study, the research participants reported that contradictory demands were being placed on them. They were expected to provide their employer with the necessary skills, knowledge, attitudes and behaviours to enable them to remain competitive, while at the same time be flexible in the way they conducted their work to allow the organisation to adapt to the changing market conditions.

International markets at the time of the present study were unstable ('Economic Outlook', 2003). Following the 'War on Iraq', the U.S. dollar was performing poorly in relation to other currencies, having the effect of strengthening the Rand and in doing so, influencing financial markets in South Africa. Company balance sheets across the world deteriorated due to the global downturn, reducing investment everywhere ('Economic Outlook'). Financial service organisations were feeling the effect of a reduction in investment, and the fluctuating Rand. Unstable financial conditions and poor consumer confidence was directly affecting profitability in these organisations, necessitating that they increasingly relied on their human resources as a source of competitive advantage. Participants discussed the intense competition in the financial services industry and the increasing demands this placed on the standard of their work output.

On a national level, changes made to legislation in South Africa resulted in previously excluded racial and ethnic groups being incorporated into organisational structures which influenced the work-life of participants in the present research study. Over and above trying to compete on an international level, South African organisations were struggling to cope with adjusting to this new legislation. Existing human resources were learning to adjust to working in a diverse workforce. Differences in worldviews, national differences in value orientations, and domestic ethnic differences all created potential for misunderstandings and conflict (Gross, 2002). Participants in the present study discussed the significant amount of change in their working environment, and how these changes created uncertainty in their jobs. This was aggravated by the poor levels of employment in South Africa which contributed to feelings of insecurity.

South Africa had, in the years prior to this research, faced a more or less obliteration of the second-tier banking sector, which resulted in more than 20 banks collapsing, merging, or being taken over (Evans, 2002). As a result, there were many redundancies in the financial services sector. A combination of economic conditions in South Africa resulting in fewer jobs being made available, and employees in financial services organisations witnessing many of their colleagues being retrenched, affected the attitudes and work-related behaviour of the participants.

Organisational level conditions were a focal point for discussion in this study. They emerged as greatly influencing the sustainability of work-related behaviour of participants in this study. Faced with volatile and increasingly demanding business environments, organisations were required to carefully examine and assess their 'competence' to compete and achieve success in the marketplace (Lindsay & Stuart, 1997). This task was made more complex by the rapid rate of change and the phenomenon of discontinuity at the time of this study (Lindsay & Stuart). Participants described how the organisation had adopted a '*culture of change*' to adapt to marketplace conditions. Demands to produce unique products were causing senior managers to challenge the very fabric of their organisations, viz. their organisational cultures and their ways of operating (Lindsay & Stuart). This resulted in participants commenting on how the organisation itself did not sustain projects through to completion since flexibility, speed and continuous self-renewal were identified as key to survival (Bartlett & Ghoshal, 2002). Organisations and managers increasingly

placed their hopes on employees in the organisation to provide a competitive advantage, resulting in a requirement that participants were flexible in their manner of work, as well as that they sustained competencies, skills and behaviours for the duration of their employment with the organisation.

The various divisions in which participants worked also influenced their ability to sustain work-related behaviour. Dating from the early work of Allport (1924, as cited in Steers & Porter, 1991), Mayo (1933, as cited in Steers & Porter), and Roethlisberger and Dickson (1939, as cited in Steers & Porter), a considerable body of research data has accumulated on the effects of the social aspects of an employee's work environment on behaviour (Steers & Porter). Individuals seldom work in isolation and they are often strongly affected by the social forces that exist in both the immediate and the larger organisational setting (Steers & Porter). Porter, Lawler & Hackman (1991) found that individuals in the workplace had a direct impact on behaviour by enforcing norms regarding what are appropriate effort levels to expend on the job and what is the proper performance strategy. Members of an organisation communicated to participants 'what leads to what' in the broader organisation, and thereby affected the individuals own choices about their behaviour (Porter, Lawler & Hackman). This was evident in the different sub-cultures that were found to exist in the various organisational units. Certain units approached work in a more relaxed manner (Site 3) while others adopted a very business-like work ethic, having a direct influence on the work-related behaviour of participants in the present study.

Each different contextual condition was traced to uncover how it related to the phenomenon under study. It was necessary to be explicit about such influences to provide a holistic picture of the phenomenon under investigation. The next stage in the paradigm model is the intervening conditions which helped or hindered the participants to sustain behaviour over time.

### **5.1.3 Intervening Conditions**

Intervening conditions are the conditions that act to either facilitate or constrain the action or interaction strategies taken within the organisational setting (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). A number of intervening conditions emerged from the data as pertaining to sustainability of behaviour, namely; the culture of change in the

organisation, unsustainable organisational practices, insufficient resources, the physical work environment, and the particular point in time in which behaviour occurred.

### ***Culture of Change***

Participants in this study frequently referred to the culture of the organisation, i.e., it being a culture of change. However, upon investigation, it appeared that they used the term 'culture' to include organisational climate.

Although the concepts are similar and there is evidence that the two terms are often used synonymously (Barker, 1994, as cited in Wallace, Hunt & Richards, 1999), there are important differences and it is necessary to distinguish between them.

Organisational culture is widely understood to be made up of a collection of fundamental values and belief systems which give meaning to organisations (Schein, 1985). In this respect, it was argued to be a more implicit concept than organisational climate, which consists of empirically accessible elements such as behavioural and attitudinal characteristics (Wallace, Hunt & Richards). Organisational climate is a surface level indicator of culture, it is an individual construct that reflects an orientation based on personal values (Wallace, Hunt & Richards). The results of the present study can be best understood through the understanding of organisational climate as the participants' perceptions of their work environment (Altmann, 2000). These perceptions reflected the way in which participants described the workplace (Altmann), which in this study was reported as quick to change.

The rapidly changing business world has been well documented in the literature (see Hardijzer, 1999; Sparrow, 2000; Templer & Cawsey, 1999; Thompson, 1997; Thompson & Richardson, 1996). Almost every business has faced unrelenting pressures to achieve and maintain a competitive position (Sparrow). What these participants were experiencing and thus describing was the dynamics of a changing business world, and the effect this was having on their work. Participants in the present study reported being confused and uncertain about the overall organisational strategy and direction. In an environment that is dominated by rapid change, communicating the direction and focus of the organisation became very difficult since by the time senior managers had relayed new organisational goals to all of the

organisational members, these had changed. The organisation was required to change its strategic direction so rapidly that there was not enough time to communicate this message to all of the organisational members. Contextual conditions at the time of the present study were thus intertwined with conditions that were found to facilitate or moderate sustainability of behaviour in the model, and with the ability of managers to communicate clear goals and expectations. When things change fast, communication systems need to improve and organisations must foster a culture of innovation and adaptive change (Thompson & Richardson). More discretion needs to be given to employees throughout the organisation; empowerment is key (Thompson & Richardson). Whether or not the organisation could communicate the goals and objectives of the organisation thus served to either moderate or facilitate the ability of participants to sustain behaviour over time. This directly influenced the job characteristic reported by participants of needing clear goals and expectations, without which they were found not to be able to sustain behaviour over time.

The culture of change moderated the ability to sustain behaviour over time as it inhibited the flow of information, which was needed to communicate the strategic direction of the organisation and translate it into clear goals and deliverables for the participants. In the present study, the organisation was attempting to empower employees, but office politics and poor communication stood in the way of being able to adapt to such change in an effective manner. Communication systems need to be improved to cope with the demand, and senior managers should avoid contradictory messages of indirectly maintaining a bureaucratic structure while at the same time encouraging empowerment and innovation (Thompson & Richardson, 1996). In this way, the constraining nature of the culture of change on sustainability of behaviour could be minimised. Another condition that was found to influence sustainability of behaviour related to the practices of the senior members in the organisation.

### ***Unsustainable Organisational Practices***

A further finding in this study that served to intervene on employee sustainability was the tendency of organisational practices to, themselves, be unsustainable in nature. Specifically, participants described how senior management often implemented new human resource initiatives or drives, but did not sustain these projects over time. The findings indicated that the organisation-wide unsustainability was a consequence of



rapid changes in the marketplace, necessitating reactive rather than proactive behaviour, and indicating the interrelated nature of these practices and contextual conditions. Lindsay and Stuart (1997) described that in tranquil times, pressures on organisations were largely to augment and/or develop their designated range of products, services and processes. Organisations extrapolate from the past to anticipate and address the demands of the future (Lindsay & Stuart). However, at the time of the present study organisations were not facing simple requirements for “more of the same”, they were facing demands for “being different” (Lindsay & Stuart). As a result, senior managers were being charged with continually reconstruing (i.e., interpreting the meaning of, and arriving at, a new construction of understanding) as and when the market demanded (Lindsay & Stuart).

Respondents were aware, however, that to keep abreast of competition, the organisation needed to change its strategic direction as and when the marketplace demanded. However, this rapid change resulted in the abandonment of projects, drives or initiatives in favour of new projects which were popular at a point in time and in line with new strategic objectives. In this way, participants described how organisational practices were not sustainable in nature. Respondents reported that such behaviour filtered through the organisation and influenced lower-level employees to practice unsustainable behaviours themselves. In addition, these changed initiatives had the influence of placing different pressures on their jobs, or altering the expectations of their output which contributed to them not sustaining a particular set of actions at a point in time. Participants felt that senior management had to demonstrate sustainability of behaviour in their practices, which would result in such behaviour trickling down to lower-level employees in the organisation and thereby influencing the behaviour in these members. Organisational practices were therefore an intervening condition which served to facilitate (through the demonstration of sustainability) or moderate (through the demonstration of unsustainability) sustainability of behaviour. A further intervening condition was the availability of important resources to enable individuals to perform work-related activities.

### ***Resources***

Most participants in the present study cited the availability of resources as a condition that either facilitated or constrained sustainability of behaviour. Having sufficient resources facilitated sustainability of behaviour, while insufficient resources constrained such behaviour. The resources identified were time, financial and information resources.

Research has shown that a lack of resources such as time, money or materials has a negative effect on work-related behaviour (Scarnati, 2001). When participants did not have sufficient time, money or information available to complete the work that was expected of them by the organisation, it resulted in frustration and de-motivation at not having the correct tools to do the job. This influenced sustainability of behaviour. Behaviour could not be sustained over time without the necessary resources to complete the work. Insufficient resources are linked to the causal condition, intrinsic motivation. Intrinsically motivated employees are motivated by a feeling of competence which is obtained from accomplishing work-related tasks successfully (Deci & Ryan, 1991). If participants could not complete tasks, they could not feel the sense of accomplishment needed to reinforce such behaviour since their reward was linked to this feeling of competence. A lack of resources in a workplace has also been shown to lead to members protecting or furthering their own interests, resulting in an increase in organisational politics (Poon, 2003). Certain causal conditions and managerial behaviours were thus linked to this intervening condition as influencing sustainability of behaviour.

### ***Time Factors***

A further finding in this study with respect to intervening conditions is the point of time in which work-related behaviours took place. Participants described that a certain point in time for themselves and/or for the business would determine whether or not they sustained behaviours at that particular time or not.

Time is an important part of organisations and organisational behaviour (Bergh, 1993, 1999). Bergh (1999) advised that when data is collected in an organisation, time effects should be factored into theoretical relationships. Different types of time variations existed in the present study (Bergh, 1999). Seasonal variations occurred

regularly over time (regular time intervals), such as an increased workload for many employees before the end of a financial year (Bergh, 1999). Personological variation is the variation in characteristics of the individual over time (Bergh, 1999). Examples were the participants' evaluation of self and others or political leanings, which were subject to change. One participant described having gone through a difficult time in his personal life in the form of a divorce which made it difficult for him to sustain a level of work-related behaviour at that time. The point in time in an individual's or organisation's life therefore facilitated or constrained whether or not behaviours were sustained over time. Another intervening factor related to the physical work environment in which participants in the present study conducted their work-related behaviour.

### ***The Physical Work Environment***

The finding in this study with respect to intervening conditions was that the physical work environment in which participants worked influenced action or interaction strategies taken in relation to sustainability of behaviour. The most salient feature of the physical work environment that emerged from the data was the open-plan layout of the offices.

Many of the research participants discussed how the open-plan layout of their offices was disruptive, and affected productivity. Rowh (1999) wrote that effective work design and a consideration of the ergonomics in a workplace is a crucial factor in achieving and maintaining employee productivity. A comfortable and easy-to-use workspace translates to more productive workers (Rowh). The environment can inhibit, interfere with, or set limits on the range of work behaviours displayed, which in turn affects task performance (Olson & Borman, 1989). Rowh links the office work environment with motivation, claiming that it motivates employees to make the most of their day, highlighting the relationship between this construct and intrinsic attributes such as motivation (Rowh). If an employee finds the physical layout in their environment disruptive, it will hinder their ability to sustain work-related behaviour over time, and alternately, if they find this environment conducive to work-related behaviour, it will facilitate such behaviour over time.

Recently, BOSTI Associated engaged in two major waves of research about the effect of the physical work environment on work (Brill, Keable & Fabiniak, 2000). In the 1980s, data was collected from some 10,000 workers in about 100 corporate and governmental organisations, and since 1994 over 11,000 employees in some 80 business locations were surveyed (Brill, Keable & Fabiniak). This research showed that a good workplace was one that supported everyone's need for distraction-free work as well as the need for interaction (Brill, Keable & Fabiniak). However, they argued that managers' mantra of needing more open organisations was often too simplistically translated. An open organisation is not necessarily an open-plan layout, but rather a space providing acoustic privacy, supporting impromptu meetings, and supportive of one-to-one meetings in the workplace (Brill, Keable & Fabiniak). This research could explain the contradictory finding in this study – some participants found the open-plan spaces facilitative, and others found them disruptive. Some participants' needs for distraction-free work were met in the physical design and layout of the workspace, while others were not. An office layout should facilitate effective communication and interaction as well as provide for the need for acoustic privacy. Finding a balance between the two is important for the sustainability of employee behaviour, and therefore the overall competitiveness of the organisation.

Intervening conditions such as the organisational culture, the availability of necessary resources, time factors and the layout of the physical work environment were found to exert an influence on the sustainability of behaviour phenomenon, and were interrelated and connected in significant ways to other conditions in the multi-dimensional model. Participants undertook several action or interaction strategies to minimise the influence of these conditions on their work behaviour.

#### **5.1.4 Action/Interaction Strategies**

Participants in the present study attempted to manage, cope with, handle or respond to conditions that existed in the organisational context in certain ways which determined their ability to sustain behaviour over time (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The findings in this study revealed five such action/interaction strategies that participants undertook to manage sustainability of behaviour. These were monitoring personal motivation levels to maintain a focus on positive behaviour, creating structure in their jobs by

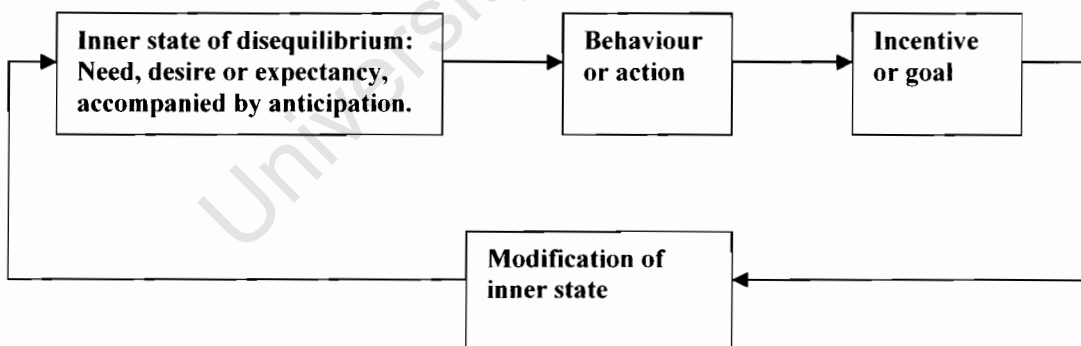
setting clear goals and tasks, communicating to managers their needs and expectations and learning to adapt to change or leaving the organisation.

### ***Periodically Check Motivation***

To sustain behaviour over time, participants in this study reported that it was necessary to periodically monitor personal motivation levels to ensure a focus on positive behaviour. This finding was in keeping with literature on the motivational process. Steers and Porter (1991) put forward a model of this process which was used to explain this action taken by the participants to regulate their behaviour.

In motivational theory, individuals attempt to reduce the internal state of disequilibrium by acting or behaving in a certain manner that they believe will lead to the desired goal (see Figure 5.2) (Steers & Porter, 1991). The initiation of this action then sets up a series of cues, either within the individuals or from their external environment, which feed information back to the individuals concerning the impact of their behaviour (Steers & Porter). Such cues may lead to them modifying (or ceasing) their present behaviour, or reassuring them that their present course of action is correct (Steers & Porter). The behaviour that participants described as keeping periodic checks on personal motivation levels essentially related to them monitoring and maintaining their personal motivation levels over time.

**Figure 5.2 A Generalised Model of the Basic Motivation Process (Steers & Porter, 1991, p. 6).**



Participants regulated their behaviour in order to sustain motivation levels. Whether or not a participant sustained motivation levels directly resulted in whether they sustained work-related behaviour, and was thus an important action strategy to

undertake. This strategy is inextricably linked to the intrinsic attribute of intrinsic motivation, which itself has been shown to be reliant on several other conditions in the sustainability of behaviour model, once again highlighting the integrated, multi-dimensional nature of this model.

An organisation could control this action strategy to some extent. Formal training could teach employees how to monitor their motivation levels, and time allocation and procedures for employee reflection could be incorporated into their work-related activities.

### ***Create Structure***

The finding of this study was that participants either learned to adapt to change, or were in the process of leaving the organisation. Changes in the organisational environment led to a flatter hierarchical structure and increased employee autonomy, resulting in less structure in employee work. Employees needed to adjust and adapt to these changes to ‘*survive*’ in the organisation. One way that participants did this was to create structure in their own work by setting clear goals and tasks for themselves. The ability of participants to create such structure was, to some extent, dependent on their respective managers allowing them the necessary autonomy and flexibility to structure their work. This action strategy was thus connected to managerial style in the sustainability of behaviour model.

Despite a large amount of literature which has focused on the inadequacies of a bureaucratic structure for workplace behaviour and an increasing advocacy of more autonomy and empowerment for individual workers, there has not been much emphasis on the consequences of too much autonomy for such individuals in the contemporary work environment (see Appelbaum & Santiago, 1997; Bowen & Lawler, 1992). Such changes in the workplace have complex consequences for behaviour, and need to be given due consideration rather than be a dichotomous solution to the problem of too much control. Reducing bureaucracy requires more than simply reducing jobs and becoming more lean (Block, 1987). The finding of this study was that these changes to the organisational structure were having severe consequences for individuals in the workplace. The lack of structure in their jobs led to either a flight or a yield response – either adapt to change or leave. If an employee

was able to adapt to such changes and create structure in their otherwise unstructured and uncertain jobs, it influenced whether or not they are able to sustain such behaviour over time.

The organisation could potentially minimise such negative consequences as employees exiting the organisation by attempting to balance the amount of structure and autonomy in the work of their employees, which is one of the job characteristics identified by participants as determining sustainability of behaviour. The sustainability model is multi-dimensional in nature. Influencing this job characteristic will determine to some extent the strategies undertaken by participants to attempt to control the negative influence of contextual conditions on their work-related behaviour. Another such strategy which emerged when analysing the data of the present study was communication between participants and their respective managers.

### ***Communicate Needs and Expectations***

This study found that some participants actively attempted to communicate their needs and expectations to their respective managers. This ensured that these needs and expectations had a greater chance of being met. Communication refers to all work-related activities in which the employee and their manager exchange information in order to accomplish tasks (Sonnentag, 2000). Communication activities thus include work activities such as information exchange of task related information, participation in formal meetings, or providing feedback (Sonnentag).

A research study conducted by Sonnentag (2000) on communication and work-related performance found that there were differences with respect to individuals in organisational settings who were regarded as excellent performers and those that were not. Excellent performers were found to be more involved in communication activities, such as asking for feedback, than moderate performers (Sonnentag). If participants communicated their needs and expectations, and actively sought feedback from their respective managers on whether their work-related behaviour was in line with organisational expectations, they exhibited the behaviour required of them. Through this, they were able to monitor and adjust work-related behaviour in line with expectations, thereby having a greater chance of meeting such expectations and in turn having their needs met. This cannot be accomplished, however, if such

managers do not provide accurate information on organisational expectations, indicating once again that there is a reciprocal relationship between this strategy and certain causal conditions such as managerial style, and job characteristics such as clear goals and expectations. If the needs and expectations of both employees and the organisation are met, a mutually beneficial relationship results and employees are more likely to sustain work-related behaviour over time through the maintenance of motivation levels. An organisation should, however, ensure that such communication channels do exist to facilitate such behaviour.

In summary, many of the variables identified in the present study that influenced sustainability of behaviour was supported by literature that found a causal relationship between such variables and work-related behaviour. However, prior research to date has not taken a holistic approach and put forward an interactive or “system” dynamic to explain such behaviour. It is not enough to merely control one of the conditions in the sustainability of behaviour model, since the conditions are interrelated. This finding furthers previous research that has traditionally identified a particular variable as influencing work-related behaviour, thus advocating a unitary perspective to the management of organisational behaviour. The foregoing discussion makes it apparent that a multitude of variables throughout the organisational milieu can be important inputs into the sustainability of behaviour equation. Such a conclusion forces us to take a broad perspective when we attempt to understand or explain why employees sustain or do not sustain behaviour at work.

## **5.2 THE HOLISTIC NATURE OF THE MODEL AND THE THEME OF CHANGE**

This study explored the factors that influenced sustainability of behaviour in an organisational setting and developed a conceptual framework for understanding this phenomenon. Finding out why employees are able to sustain these competencies or not for the duration of their employment is becoming increasingly important since organisations have begun to apply a long-term perspective to their human resources. Organisations are increasingly developing their employees as future resources upon which they can draw as they grow and develop (Steers & Porter, 1991).



The model put forward in this study distinguished between intrinsic attributes, job characteristics, management style, interview conduct, intervening conditions and action or interaction strategies which were *all* found to exert an influence on the ability to sustain behaviour over time. When considering the literature reviewed in Chapter Two of this document in the light of the findings of the present research study, two things are noticeable. Firstly, it became apparent that it was not enough to look for a single causal factor to account for the complex nature of contemporary workplace behaviour. The present study does not refute such theories or research findings, and even provides evidence that such theories do explain work-related behaviour to some extent. For example, the field of behavioural momentum, which has attempted to explain human behaviour as a consequence of external factors, has some similarities to, and differences from, the findings of this study. It was argued that behaviour varies in its resistance to changing environmental contingencies and that this resistance is due to the rate of reinforcement density associated with behaviour (Nevin, Mandell & Atak, 1983). The explanation for such behaviour provided by the field of behavioural momentum has been empirically tested (Nevin, Mandell & Atak), and was supported to some extent by the findings of the present study. External factors were found to influence work-related behaviour, in particular the sustainability of such behaviour. However, behavioural momentum proposed that behaviour is influenced only by external factors, and in doing so does not take into account the possibility of other influencing variables. It is too simplistic to attribute a complex phenomenon such as work-related behaviour to only one factor. By providing organisations with a simplistic explanation for such behaviour, there is a danger that organisations may be tempted to adopt such a solution since it is relatively easy to change external variables. In this way, organisations could ignore factors which are not surface variables, but which, too, have an influence and determine the sustainability of work-related behaviour.

Another example are the theories of organisational behaviour that focus only on what goes on 'inside the person' such as self-theory, which have a similar weakness. The present study does not refute such findings, and even provides evidence that such theories do explain work-related behaviour to some extent. Intrinsic attributes emerged from the data as a causal condition for sustainability of behaviour. But such factors in isolation cannot provide an adequate explanation for the various causal,

moderating, or aggravating variables that exert an influence on behaviour in the workplace.

What the present study proposes is that it is necessary to combine all of these perspectives to adequately explain an object of study. Entering the research process from a unitary perspective, or hypothesising what could possibly have explained sustainability of behaviour would have served the purpose uncovering only some of the variables that are influencing such behaviour. In the contemporary world of work, it is no longer enough to look for, and provide, simple explanations that can account for work-related behaviour. Theories need to be updated to embrace the complexity of such work to assist organisations in their quest for survival.

The second noticeable facet was the pervasive and constant theme of change which emerged from conducting a study in the present working climate. Throughout all of the conditions found to exert an influence on the sustainability of behaviour phenomena, one theme remained dominant: that of change.

### **The Theme of Change**

“Constant change has permeated completely and indiscriminately every aspect of life and work” (Hoag, Ritschard & Cooper, 2002, p. 6). Catalysed by technological breakthroughs in information, distribution, and communication systems, contemporary organisations are immersed in a cyclone of change as they strive to adapt to the ever increasing demands of their domestic and global markets (Chandler, 1994, as cited in Siegal et al., 1996). There has been a great deal of recent literature documenting the amount of change experienced by organisations (see Appelbaum, St-Pierre & Glavas, 1998; Eriksson, 2004; Moran & Mead, 2001; Stuart, 1995). These experiences of change persistently emerged in the interviews held with participants of the present study.

While there are those who see change as a threat because the outcome is less certain than leaving things as they are (Fox-Wolfgramm, Boal & Hunt, 1998; Greve, 1998), some concede that they must change to survive (Hoag, Ritschard & Cooper, 2002). This seemed to be the case with the research participants. Even though they admitted that such change had far reaching consequences on their work and working lives, they

reported how change was necessary for the survival of the organisation. They admitted to having to accept this notion, or if not, that they should leave the organisation. Despite their noble confessions to having accepted change, the pervasiveness of such change on their ability to conduct their work and their discussions thereof revealed that perhaps participants had not accepted the effect of such change as much as they professed. Accepting the necessity of change was, in the circumstances, a better option than the reported alternative: to exit the organisation. Interviews with participants revealed conscious attempts to force themselves to adapt to the changing conditions, as one respondent phrased it, *'you have to brainwash yourself to the extent to which you start feeling comfortable with it [change] after a while and then you live that'*. What emerged was therefore a need to adapt to such change in order to survive in their positions.

Common obstacles to organisational change include politics and the conflicts between competing groups in a contextually changing process (Eriksson, 2004). However, politics in an organisation generally occurs in conditions of uncertainty and ambiguity, in other words conditions brought about by change (Gilmore, Ferris, Dulebohn & Harrell-Cook, 1996). As a consequence of the research organisation's environment being dominated by perpetual change, participants described the large amounts of organisational politicking. Senior managers were encouraged to develop a more participative climate in the form of empowerment, but had not accepted the loss of more overt control that they had worked hard to secure (Siegal et al., 1996). Ironically it is these political behaviours which are obstacles to successful change initiatives, and which also hinder sustainability of behaviour. The effective management of the change process from conception through the various managerial layers is thus important to prevent failure at some point in their implementation (Siegal et al.). Organisations need to demonstrate sustainability in their change initiatives and not abandon such projects before they have reached the end of their cycle, as participants in the present study reported the organisation as doing. This behaviour affected the participants' job functions as when a new focus and direction was deemed necessary by senior management, it resulted in a change to lower-level employee job descriptions. The result was that participants did not get the opportunity in all cases to see projects through to completion, which was a necessary prerequisite for intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1991). As mentioned before, intrinsically

motivated employees are motivated by a feeling of competence which is obtained from accomplishing work-related tasks successfully (Deci & Ryan). If participants could not complete tasks, they could not feel the sense of accomplishment needed to reinforce such behaviour since their reward was linked to this feeling of competence.

Personality traits such as perfectionism and having an internal locus of control were all found to cause sustainability of behaviour. With the amount of change leading to uncertainty in the work-related goals and expectations of participants, very often changes to these expectations resulted in participants not being able to change such a situation or being able to achieve the high standards necessary for them to keep sustaining behaviour over time. On the same note, most participants described the need for clear goals and expectations, which were linked to the need for autonomy, as having clear expectations allowed participants to structure their work as they deemed fit. The absence of such clear goals due to the constantly changing strategic direction had a spiralling effect on the ability of subjects to sustain behaviour over time.

It was evident from this study that the effect of change on the work-related behaviour of employees in the contemporary work environment cannot be underestimated, and therefore needs consideration when conducting research or designing human resource practices. Perhaps understanding these complexities will facilitate how workplace practices are managed in the future and help prepare organisations when dealing with practices such as unsustainability of behaviour (Goodman, 1999).

### **5.3 SUMMARY**

This chapter discussed the results obtained in this study and compared these with existing literature and research. Many of the variables identified in the present study that influenced sustainability of behaviour was supported by literature that found a causal relationship between such variables and work-related behaviour. However, the finding of this study was that a combination of these variables influenced sustainability of behaviour since they were found to be interrelated, and that it was not enough to look for a single explanation for such complex contemporary organisational behaviour.

This chapter proposed a multi-dimensional, holistic model to account for sustainability of behaviour in the context of current organisational change. The following chapter considers these findings in the light of the implications they have for organisational practice and research.

## CHAPTER SIX - APPLICATION

*'The outcome of any serious research can only be to make two questions grow where one question grew before'*

- Veblen (1908, as cited in Ratcliffe, 2000)

This research explored sustainability of behaviour in an organisational setting. In the previous chapter, the results of the study were discussed and compared with prior literature and research. In this chapter, these findings are considered in the light of the implications they have for organisational practice (6.1), what the limitations of the research project are (6.2), and finally some suggestions are made for future research (6.3). A summary of this chapter is provided in section 6.4.

### 6.1 IMPLICATIONS OF THE FINDINGS

This research study has a number of potential implications for contemporary practice. The first of these relates to the recruitment and selection of a workforce. These personnel activities usually consist of identifying a specific set of competencies needed for a job, such as intrinsic motivation and personality traits, and measuring these in potential applicants. While this research validates the necessity of uncovering and measuring competencies needed to perform a job, what emerged from this study was that the ability to sustain a certain *level* of these competencies also needs inclusion into this process. In other words, whether or not employees can sustain a certain level of behaviour, skill, knowledge or attitude in the face of intense competition, change, etc., is an important consideration for predicting subsequent work-related behaviour.

The results of this study also have implications for human resource management and development. A complex, multi-dimensional model of sustainability emerged from the data analysis in this study. Behaviour can not be attributed to only one causal or intervening factor. The implication of this finding for human resource management and development, therefore, is that a holistic approach is necessary for the

management of employees in the contemporary workplace. In this way, it may be possible to begin to understand and take precautions for unsustainability of behaviour.

## **6.2 LIMITATIONS OF THIS STUDY**

This qualitative study has a number of limitations that need to be recognised when considering the results obtained. These limitations relate to the methodology and sample of the current study.

### **6.2.1 Methodology**

The primary limitation of this study was that data was collected at one point in time. The result was that the present research could merely provide a snapshot of reality that occurred in a single time frame in the ongoing process of sustainability. The conclusions in the present study are thus limited to one period of time and are subject to further tests based on data collected at other times (Babbie & Mouton, 2001).

### **6.2.2 Sample**

The sample of the present study consisted of fourteen individuals who worked as managers in a financial services organisation. A limitation is that the sample was drawn from individuals who were all on a similar job grade, i.e., managerial level. The sample was thus not representative of the entire organisation. The aim of sampling is to include those persons, places, or situations that will provide the greatest opportunity to gather the most relevant data about the phenomenon under investigation (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). For the present study, the individuals included were identified as most likely to provide the necessary information since entry-level employees did not have enough tenure, and senior-level members did not have enough time available to participate.

The fact that the sample was drawn from a single financial services organisation was partially overcome by the fact that this organisation is divided into several locations, each having its own unique culture and work ethic. Miles and Huberman (1994) pointed out that the inclusion of several settings in a study strengthens the conceptual validity of a study and helps determine the conditions under which the findings will hold. The fact that financial services organisations are distinctive in their way of doing business cannot, however, be ignored. The uniqueness of a study within a

specific context mitigates against replicating it exactly in another context (Creswell, 1994). To overcome this limitation, statements about the researcher's central assumptions, the selection of informants, and the biases and values of the researcher were made explicit in order to enhance the chances of the present study being replicated in another setting (Creswell).

Further research is needed to determine to what extent the results of this study could be transferred to other organisational settings and job grades.

### **6.3 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

During the course of this research process a number of potential areas for future study were identified. One finding in this study was the need for constructive feedback from managers regarding work-related functioning. Despite the availability of prior research concerned with the "acceptability" of positive or negative feedback (Peterson & Ruiz-Quintanilla, 2003; Wilsey, 1995), few empirical studies have directly investigated the impact of feedback on the subsequent behaviour of employees in the work situation (Pearce & Porter, 1991). The participants in this study reported that constructive feedback from their respective managers was a causal factor for sustainability of behaviour, indicating the need for future research to support this causal relationship found between constructive feedback and work-related behaviour.

The present study was exploratory in nature so in this sense it provided a foundation on which future research could be built. Several factors were found to influence sustainability of behaviour; however, what was not certain was how strong the impact or influence of each variable was in determining such behaviour. Future research is needed to determine whether certain variables exert a greater influence, or not.

Given the time constraints placed on the current research, a longitudinal study focusing on the behaviour of employees from when they enter an organisation over time could prove very valuable. In this way, individual behaviour could be observed from entry and the impact of variables such as job characteristics could be determined as and when employees are exposed to them. Perhaps some sort of time dimension could be factored in, for example, the outcome of exposure to a combination of job characteristics for one year.



Finally, further research is needed to validate the model put forward in the present study, as well as its applicability to other organisational settings which could increase its generalisability.

South African organisations are struggling to cope in an environment characterised by a combination of factors such as competition on a global platform and the various challenges associated with a country in transition. A multitude of variables now exert an influence on organisational behaviour. In order to understand the complexities of behaviour in the contemporary workplace, research is needed that can interpret such behaviour in the light of these factors which have all been found to exert an influence on workplace behaviour. It is no longer sufficient to approach problems from a single perspective. Research needs to reflect the multi-dimensional nature of the contemporary world of work. Perhaps then sustainable solutions to organisational problems can be found.

#### **6.4 SUMMARY**

This chapter offered recommendations to organisational practice in the light of the findings of the study. It was suggested that recruitment and selection practices include whether or not individuals could sustain a certain *level* of competencies or not, as opposed to merely identifying the individual competencies needed for a job.

Limitations of the present study were also detailed in this chapter specifically with respect to the methodology and the sample employed. Finally, future areas of research were considered as certain areas emerged from this research as needing further investigation.

## CHAPTER SEVEN – CONCLUSION

The purpose of this research was to explore sustainability of behaviour in an organisational setting, and to develop a conceptual framework for understanding this phenomenon in the form of a model. The researcher attempted to develop this understanding by focusing on the subjective experiences of employees working in an organisational setting.

Due to the lack of prior literature and research on sustainability of behaviour in the organisational context, the major thrust and contribution of the present research study involved defining this concept, and developing a model from which practitioners and researchers could begin to understand the complexities involved in sustainability of behaviour in the workplace.

The results of this study indicated a multi-dimensional relationship between causal conditions, intervening conditions, contextual conditions and action/interaction strategies which all influenced whether or not an individual sustained behaviour in the workplace.

It became evident in the present study that working in the contemporary work environment is often complex and contradictory. Organisations are facing competing demands, which have an impact on the work-related behaviour of employees. The success of an organisation is increasingly dependent on its human resources. Organisational psychologists need to continue to work toward a refinement of the principles of a harmonious working relationship between an organisation and its members, thereby uncovering the true potential that such employees may offer.

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**APPENDIX - Letter of Consent Form**

**[Date]**

Dear [Name]

**Letter requesting consent to participate in research**

I am currently undertaking a research project for the purposes of a thesis for my Masters Degree in Industrial & Organisational Psychology at U.C.T. The Human Resources Department have given their permission for me to conduct my research project at [Company Name], and have provided me with a list of individuals to contact who are currently between grade 6 – 8 in the organisation due to reasons of access and availability. This is the manner in which I obtained your email address.

The project will focus on ‘sustainability of behaviour’. Several industrial and organisational psychologists have noticed that individuals are able to demonstrate certain behaviours when entering an organisation, but that these behaviours do not always remain present over time. My aim is to understand more about sustainability of behaviour in the organisational setting, and to possibly uncover what factors hinder or facilitate individuals from exhibiting these behaviours in this context.

Your responses in the research will remain completely anonymous. Responses will be grouped according to categories which emerge (detailing the number of individuals who experience certain attributes which hinder or facilitate sustainable behaviour), and the reasons why such behaviour is or is not present.

The research interviews will take the form of in-depth interviews (approximately 1 hour), and possibly a short follow-up interview to clear up vague responses, or for elaboration of incomplete answers.

You are under no obligation to participate in the study. If you would be so kind as to afford me some time to participate in the research, please email/post the following form to me providing me with your written consent.

**Email:** [Researcher's Email Address]

**Post:** [Researchers Physical Address]

Thank you,  
Marcelle Wilkinson

[Date]

**Letter of Consent**

I, \_\_\_\_\_ give my consent to be a participant in the research project on sustainability of behaviour to be conducted by Marcelle Wilkinson, provided the information is used in a manner in which I remain anonymous.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_